HEROINE OF THE PRAIRIES

SHEBA HARGREAVES

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A Romance of the Oregon Trail

By SHEBA HARGREAVES

AUTHOR *of*
"The Cabin at the Trail's End," "Ward of the Redskins," etc.

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I

THE EMIGRANT FAMILY

"The Oregon Trail" was well defined and comparatively safe well before the middle of the last century. The way traveled so haltingly by the eighteen covered wagons of the timid immigration of 1830 was now a broad road, ankle deep in stifling alkali dust over the "Great American Desert," and a narrow crooked ribbon rutted to the hub in the tortuous mountain passes.

During the previous years lurching wagons behind the slow-paced oxen were driven by grim-faced men with their women and children. Families were virtually fleeing from a half-developed Middle Western frontier where fever and ague had taken a fearful toll of life, and the panic of 1837 had made living conditions too difficult to be endured when the rich untrammeled slopes of the Pacific coast beckoned them westward.

Once the trail was blazed, the country farther to the east and south experienced a great wave of emigrating fever. Money could be made easily in the Oregon country. The risk of the crossing was not now considered great. Herds of cattle and horses could be safely driven across the plains, where they could be depended upon to lay the foundation of

great fortunes for their owners in a new country. So well-to-do families came bearing all their goods and chattels to carry on commerce in the thriving new frontier settlement.

Horses, a precious commodity in a country where the stubborn cayuse ponies were being pressed into sulky service, were driven across the continent in bands. Cattle and sheep found a sparse livelihood along the dusty road as they journeyed to reach the lush grasslands of the famous Willamette Valley.

Oregon in 1848 had a population steadily rising toward ten thousand, with the Provisional Government organized in 1843 operating smoothly. The Donation Land Law allowed 640 acres of the choicest land to the family. A man might take 320 acres for himself and 320 for his wife. There was haste to make a selection before the best parcels were taken. No question existed in the minds of the wayfarers of 1848. They would found vast estates. Wealth for the easy taking awaited any man in Oregon who had the nucleus of a herd of horses and cattle.

Elijah White, the leader of the emigration of 1842, had been obliged to employ a guide to lead him through the mountain passes over the vague trail westward, but now the travelers knew beforehand just how the last lap of the long journey would be accomplished. The "Barlow Road" over the Cascade Mountains had been completed in 1846. Even should the first winter days overtake the wayfarers, the last miles could be made in comparative safety.

After leaving the country of the Blackfeet Indians there were only the usual dangers incident to travel. Families straggled along, separating widely to find the best grazing for their herds, making the journey in a leisurely fashion, when compared to the haste and anxiety of the earlier expeditions.

Wagon-trains felt safe. Of course there were the usual untoward occurances such as the capsizing of a wagon bed lined with green buffalo hide that failed to turn the water of a swift mountain stream, or the cattle stampede. The Indians along the trail were threatening, but there was little danger to life, though they were constantly stealing cattle and horses. But these annoyances, with possible bodily injury or sickness, were incidentals not to be taken into serious consideration in a day when travel even on main thoroughfares in the United States carried more or less hazard.

From Fort Hall to the Blue Mountains the trail led across a long stretch of desert country. So far as physical discomfort was concerned, this was the most trying stretch in the whole journey. Rolling hills covered with loose stones that blistered the feet after they had gathered the heat of the summer sun and level valley floors asmother with acrid alkali dust made life a hideous nightmare until the cooling shade of the timbered mountains shimmering in the distance could be reached.

In the foothills of the Blue Mountains an emigrant family had struck camp beside a tiny rill of brackish

water that flowed between alkali-incrusted banks through a ravine a hundred yards or so off the trail. Passers-by did not trouble to stop, as pausing to allow the cattle to rest was by no means unusual. The immigration of 1848 was not so large as in the previous years, and besides, being rather late in the season, most of the trains had passed, to be swallowed up by the mountains swimming in summer haze to the northwest.

Judging from the horses and cattle and the general camp equipment, this was a well-to-do family traveling leisurely and at ease. Three commodious wagons, their yellow paint scarred and blistered, were drawn up in the shade of a clump of gray-green willows that made an oasis in the parched desert. Up the ravine two early 'teen-aged boys, mounted on sorrel horses, tended a herd of lean oxen and young breeding-stock, meantime keeping a watchful eye on ten horses that, in spite of their hobbles, moved swiftly from clump to clump of dry bunch grass.

Near the camp a small tow-headed girl and a freckled boy with flaming red hair were busily employed, as five and three would be, in laying out a miniature farm with sticks and pebbles from the run, during the intervals of attending on the whims of an eighteen-months baby made peevish by the heat and the cutting of stubborn first eye-teeth. A dark-eyed girl, rising ten, was carrying wood from a good-sized pile to replenish a fire that smoldered under a ten-gallon brass kettle. She grumbled a little at the

uselessness of her task. Why ten gallons of hot water should be kept in readiness day and night was clear beyond her comprehension. Yet Salita had charged her to keep the water hot and she was faithful to her trust.

A large tent with the flaps raised to admit the sultry air was pitched close to the covered wagon where the family slept. This was the general living quarters. A line of carefully washed clothes, a bit yellow on account of the hardness of the alkali water, hung limply in the still air, testifying to the chance passer-by on the road above that this was a decent, well-regulated family who did not fall into slovenly habits on account of the trying circumstances in which they found themselves.

By mid-afternoon the heat even in the shade of the willows was stifling. The three small children gave over their listless play and slept restlessly inside the tent. A woman lay quietly on a bed in the wagon. "Salita," she called feebly, when she could endure no longer.

Salita, a slender wisp of eighteen, too tall for her weight, answered her instantly, wiping the soapy water from her bare arms and smoothing down her auburn hair, where rebellious curls strayed round her smooth white forehead.

"Look once more toward the mountains, Salita," the woman requested. "My time of trial is at hand. Surely the good Lord will not leave me to face it alone."

Obediently Salita turned yearning eyes toward the blue of the mountains distorted like the fantasy of a dream in the shimmering air of the desert. She knew in her heart the futility of looking mountainward for help. She only turned aside the better to hide the quivering of her lips and the tears that suffused her wide brown eyes. The most for which she might hope was that a covered wagon would chance to pass and some kindly mother would come to their rescue.

"Tell Mattie Lou to take the baby and Sissy and Lemuel and go out to the boys. Luke and Asahel must take care of them. Luke will understand. Mind you warn Mattie Lou to keep a sharp lookout for rattlesnakes on the way." The sick woman moaned in pain then lay still with closed eyes while Salita hurriedly carried out her instructions.

Mattie Lou was only too glad to be relieved of her onerous fire-tending. She lost no time in waking Sissy and Lemuel and in adjusting the baby, Buddy, to her slender hip. They set out, gayly, Mattie Lou thinking to gather wild flowers while she tended the children out near the cattle and horses. She seldom found the opportunity to run about, and seized this one eagerly, even though heavily encumbered with her three small charges.

Salita Prentiss was planning swiftly as she saw the children off up the ravine. Never before in all her pleasant easy-going eighteen years had she faced such a difficult task. She was entirely on her own

resources, unless a wagon passed along the trail. With a compelling gaze she scanned the horizon to the east, but the hot sun only seared her aching eyeballs. Not a living thing moved in the still afternoon.

Cynthia Harkness called again, this time with a rising note of anguish in her voice. "Look out toward the mountains, Salita."

"There is no one in sight, Mrs. Harkness," Salita told her in a matter-of-fact voice. "You must tell me what to do at once. We will have to manage alone. Plenty of women have been confined on the plains. There is no danger if you tell me what to do."

"I can scarcely believe that Joe would leave me in a time like this," Cynthia Harkness mused aloud, then caught her breath with a sharp intake, before she resumed. There was neither bitterness nor complaint in her voice. She was making a simple statement of a fact that she accepted for the first time. She was alone in her time of trial, with no one but an inexperienced girl to care for her.

"Mr. Harkness would never leave you if he could help himself," Salita soothed. "He has been detained in the mountains. I am looking for him any minute now. The cattle must have strayed farther than he reckoned, but never fear, Mrs. Harkness, I know in my heart that he will come to you some time soon."

But her brave show of cheerfulness was for Mrs. Harkness. Salita, with terror in her heart, knew that

Joe Harkness had met with disaster. Nothing else could have kept him away so long. Two weeks in the mountains could mean only one thing.

Joe Harkness and his negro man, Pompey, had gone in search of ten head of cattle that had disappeared during the night. He was afraid that the Indians had stolen them. He had lost twenty head once before, and to arrive at the settlement with only ten head of a herd of forty meant a serious crippling of his resources. But if they had just wandered off there was a good chance of recovering them. Joe Harkness and the slave had cut a supply of wood from the small trees up the ravine and had then set off in quest of the stock, expecting to be gone not more than two or three days at the outside. The boys could easily manage for that short interval. His wife was approaching her confinement. She needed the rest. And the oxen were jaded and footsore; they would make all the better time for a few days' rest to crop the grass that grew scantily in the ravine.

"You are a brave girl, Salita," Mrs. Harkness went on in her soft Southern voice. "Your father drowning in that mountain stream was more than enough to endure, and then to lose your dear mother—to see her suffer so with camp fever before she died. I can't bear the trail," Cynthia Harkness's voice rose in a shrill scream as her agony came upon her.

"What is there to do but bear?" Salita asked in

a matter-of-fact tone. "You have been so good to me, Mrs. Harkness. I'll stand by you always." She hurried outside the wagon on a fancied errand to regain her composure.

But in her intervals of rest Cynthia Harkness could not be reassured. "What will we ever do?" she wailed. "We depended so on Mammy Rachel, but now mountain fever has taken her, the children are fairly running wild, and just now I need her so terribly. She nursed me when I was a baby and has taken care of all the children in turn, and now to be alone." She lay sobbing weakly.

"You have me," Salita reminded her. "I'll teach school when we reach Oregon City, but I'll always live with you and help you raise the children. I'll have no place to go until I find Uncle Gideon. He's somewhere in Oregon. He'll manage the sale of the horses for me. They'll bring a good price in the settlement. Father always said that no one lived his life without his share of sorrow. Mine has overtaken me while I'm still too young to bear it well, but every back is fitted for the load it must carry. We must learn to adjust our burdens." She was talking just to cheer the suffering woman on the bed in the wagon.

"Hurry, Salita, I must tell you what to do," Cynthia Harkness said, after a pause. She gave her instructions between gasps. "If anything happens to me and Joe does not come within a few days, take the children and make your way to the settlement.

Some one will help you over the mountains, and Joe will overtake you when he comes back here and finds you gone. You must leave a letter for him pinned on the willow tree."

"Nothing will happen to you, Mrs. Harkness," Salita reassured her, "but I'll manage somehow if things come to the worst. Luke has done a man's work all the way across the plains, and Asahel only needs a little directing. I can easily care for the children if their father should be delayed in catching up with us; no need for worry, there's always a way out. You will be well and strong in a few days now and Mr. Harkness will be here with the stray cattle in plenty of time for us to start over the mountains. You'll forget your troubles when you have a nice home in Oregon."

Salita was hurriedly laying out the things she would need before the fire as Cynthia Harkness told her to do. She stirred the embers and prepared a hot drink for the suffering mother. Within an hour she sat before the camp fire with a tiny scrap of a baby boy, with an absurd thatch of auburn hair wrapped in an old red flannel petticoat in her tired arms. He had a right to red hair, like his father's but she resented it, just the same.

Perspiration, mingled with the dust that blew as the night wind came up, dripped from Salita's face, but she did not mind. They had won out. Cynthia Harkness was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. The graying light accentuated the pallor of her

drawn face as the girl lifted the flap to give her the baby. She tiptoed away, thinking gratefully that quiet sleep was the best medicine.

The boys came up with the cattle and horses, the small children on the saddle in front of them and Sissy and Mattie Lou trudging happily behind. The little girls gazed in delight at their baby brother, but the boys went nonchalantly about the camp chores.

Mattie Lou sat proudly with the baby in her lap while Salita prepared the supper, and still the mother did not waken. A bit anxiously the girl surveyed her, then decided to let her sleep. After the children were in bed she would attend to her wants for the night.

At bedtime she took a candle and climbed into the wagon, but Cynthia Harkness only stirred and asked to be left to rest, and so Salita, with the baby on her arm, crept to her bed.

II

CYNTHIA HARKNESS'S BABY

THE baby slept peacefully through the night, as a healthy new born baby invariably does. Salita's was the drugged sleep of complete weariness, but with the turn of the morning she stirred at the slight noises of the cattle and the champing of the horses near the camp.

Luke was astir a time or two, making sure that his charges were safe. The Indians had a habit of stealing up on the emigrants and making off with the stock. He meant to bring his herd through to the settlement in spite of them, so slept with one eye and both ears open.

Toward morning when the darkness had given place to a soft gray light and streaks of rose showed faintly in the east, Salita felt anxiety for Mrs. Harkness. At the risk of disturbing her, she pulled back the flap at the end of the wagon cover and looked in. Cynthia Harkness lay just as she had left her. The girl wondered if this could be the stupor that preceded death, but creeping closer to listen was reassured by her regular easy breathing.

Cautiously she felt of her pulse and added an extra cover against the morning chill. "Poor thing," she murmured as she crept, shivering, into her own

bed. "She's tired with her grief and suffering. When she wakes she'll be so happy with her new baby."

Morning brought a strenuous round of activities. The children clamoring to be dressed and to have their breakfast of hardtack and bacon left her no time for sad reflections. The two boys had driven the cattle and horses up the ravine to graze before she entered the wagon again. Cynthia Harkness had slept peacefully through all the hubbub.

Salita, crouching before the fire, bathed the tiny baby quickly, the children hovering near to admire his magenta curves, and then, as he was sucking hungrily at his tiny fists and hot water with a wee bit of brown sugar in it failed to pacify him, she resolved to wake his mother.

Cynthia Harkness stirred when Salita spoke her name gently and finally opened wondering eyes. Catching sight of the baby in the girl's arms, she exclaimed, in amazement. "Where did you get the baby, Salita?" she asked when she finally decided that the noise from the bundle was really made by a baby. "I didn't know you had a baby. Why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"Don't you remember, your baby was born yesterday, Mrs. Harkness? You have been asleep and I didn't wake you. You needed the rest."

But Cynthia Harkness shook her head as if the matter were entirely beyond her comprehension.

"Baby?" she queried, thoughtfully. "Buddy is my baby. Bring him in to mother."

"But your new baby is a little boy, too, and he is hungry, Mrs. Harkness," Salita's anxiety completely engulfed her. Cynthia Harkness was clearly out of her head. She refused to look when the cover of the red flannel petticoat was lifted and the wrinkled pink face exposed. "My mother said that girls who are not married should not have babies," she told Salita, gently. "I don't quite understand. Bring me a strong cup of tea, Salita, and something to eat, please, then I'll sleep again."

In panic Salita set about brewing the tea. Cynthia Harkness drank it gratefully and ate the hardtack and bacon, then turned quietly on her side and slept through the long hot day.

Work kept the girl from brooding over her difficulty. "She'll know when she awakes," she told herself over and over as she went swiftly from one task to another. The baby wailed and she fed him cautiously with milk diluted with warm water, flavored with catnip from the medicine chest. She wished she had had more experience with babies, but this one seemed completely satisfied with his ration. He slept in the split-hickory rocking-chair in the suffocating tent all through the day.

"Thank Heaven we have plenty of milk," Salita told Mattie Lou, who followed her anxiously about the camp tasks, meanwhile keeping a watchful eye on her small charges to be sure that they did not go near baby brother. "Mother will wake soon and be so glad to know we have a new baby," Mattie Lou

assured the anxious Salita, though she was a bit perplexed herself. Mother had been so overjoyed with Buddy when he came, but perhaps she was just so tired she didn't notice.

"Salita," Cynthia Harkness called when she awoke refreshed from her long sleep. "I can't just remember what happened; I'll know soon, though. I feel rested and happy." She looked at Salita out of calm, clear, uncomprehending eyes. "I'll sit up tomorrow, I feel so well."

Salita hurried from the wagon, and as she caught the questioning eye of Mattie Lou suddenly threw her checked gingham apron over her head and ran up the ravine. She *must* hide the sobs that shook her. The whole responsibility rested on her and she was only eighteen and *so* tired. For a moment hot rebellion filled her. Mother and father had loved her and shielded her from the harshness of life. And now they were both dead and the woman who had comforted and cared for her, when she was bowed with sorrow, had lost her mind. For a moment she felt a wild impulse to run from it all, from the misery and the unceasing drudgery of caring for a brood of unruly, fretful children. She was weary with looking toward the blue mountains for Joe Harkness. He was probably dead—killed by the Indians. They were threatening. No use to try to make the settlement alone. They would only die in the attempt.

But she knew even while she was railing at fate

that she must carry on. Emigrant wagons would be passing. They must keep a constant lookout and hail the first one that came. Cynthia Harkness would be able to travel in a few days.

The lusty crying of the new baby brought her suddenly to her senses. She flew back to the camp and took the small bundle from the arms of concerned Mattie Lou, and with him on her hip went about fixing warm milk and water in a small patty-pan. He wrinkled his little snub nose as she held the teaspoon to his moist lips, and Salita knew that a force clear beyond her comprehension would enable her to live life as she found it, doing each small duty as it came up through the interminable days.

No time even for bewailing their fate. She wiped her tear-stained face on the edge of the red-flannel petticoat and put the baby back to sleep in the split-bottomed rocking-chair, strangely calmed by her violent outburst.

Cynthia Harkness woke and asked for strong tea and food, then drifted peacefully off to sleep again. Salita had planned to bring the baby to her and make an effort to interest her in him, but sleep overtook the mother at once, so she fed him at intervals and left him to sleep.

The next day was like the last for the mother. She drank her strong brew of tea and ate the food and turned over on her side with her face next to the wagon cover and slept. Slow terror was creeping up on Salita. Something must be done, but she hoped

against hope that tired nature would be restored with sleep and Cynthia Harkness would awake from her nap some time before many hours with the light of comprehension in her sweet blue eyes.

Luke was clearly anxious as he drove the cattle and horses in at night. The grass was almost exhausted. Mornings and evenings there was the sharp chill of fall in the air. He had his worries, too, but with the shyness of adolescence he kept them locked in his heart. He went in to speak to his mother and came down from the wagon with white lips drawn taut.

Salita looked at him with misery eating her heart, but when she made a move as if to speak to him he turned and mounted his sorrel horse and began rounding up the stock to drive them to such scant pasturage as they could find by going a mile farther up the ravine.

She decided she would have a talk with him after the children were in bed, and went about filling a pot with beans to cook for dinner. The jerked buffalo meat that they had secured from the Indians was getting low, so was the hardtack, but there was bacon enough to last them to the settlement, she hoped. The sack of flour and the rice and sugar and tea and molasses she would husband, but there was no denying the fact that they must be on the move soon or provisions would be exhausted.

Cynthia Harkness awoke toward noon and asked for her clothes. When Salita brought the baby to

her, she expressed mild surprise mingled with gentle reproach that a girl who was not married should have a baby, but dismissed the subject abruptly when the children came trooping up, overjoyed to find that mother was going to sit up to the table.

She took the lonely Buddy in her lap and crooned happily to him, but frowned in impatience at the whimperings from the red-flannel bundle that Salita finally stilled with her patty-pan of warm milk and water.

From her seat by the fire, she watched every move of the girl as she placed the baby in his chair, then when quiet was resumed rocked Buddy to sleep and gave him to Mattie Lou to put to bed for his afternoon nap. Sissy and Lemuel she told to follow like good children. The patient little girl, her two brown braids falling forward, attended to them and then went off to play, as Salita had told her that after her work was done she might go up the ravine to pick wild flowers for an hour or so.

"I'll tell you what I have decided, Salita," Mrs. Harkness volunteered after she had waited until Mattie Lou was out of hearing. "This baby of yours worries me. There are too many babies in the world. Mammy Rachel used to drown the kittens when we had more than we wanted. I'll drown this baby for you." At Salita's look of horror, she tried the gentle art of persuasion. "A girl who is not married should not have a baby; mother always told me that. I'll attend to it when I'm a bit stronger."

Humming a gay tune, she went into the wagon to lie down. Thoroughly alarmed, Salita started after Mattie Lou to recall her. She would leave her with the children while she went up the ravine to talk with Luke. There was no time now for hesitation. They must break camp in the morning. If they could reach Emigrant Springs, perhaps they would find a doctor there or at least a kindly woman who would know what to do for Mrs. Harkness. She planned as she ran. A woman who was out of her head was really dangerous both to herself and to the children. A few days or weeks and she would surely come to herself. Poor thing, she had had enough grief and hardship on the plains to destroy the reason of anyone. Salita felt a great, loving sympathy for the mother who had succumbed in mind rather than in body to her vicissitudes.

Mattie Lou was at first stubborn. "But you promised me a little time to play," she remonstrated.

"You can have it some other day soon," Salita assured her. "Mother isn't well and we must break camp in the morning."

This was different. Breaking camp and moving on toward the blue, blue mountains in the distance was the activity that the avid young soul of Mattie Lou craved. Anything was better than caring for her small brood in a hot dirty camp where there was nothing to see. She turned back willingly to the wagons.

Mattie Lou called to her when she had gone a

hundred yards or so over the hot rocky trail, but Salita did not turn. When the child screamed she looked back to see the small girl fairly flying toward the camp.

Salita flew, too, when she sensed the fact that something ontoward was going on.

Cynthia Harkness was up and working about the fire. Salita could not just make out what she was doing, but she put the last ounce of her strength in her effort to make camp.

Mattie Lou first remonstrated with her mother, then finding she could do nothing, stood screaming in fright. Cynthia Harkness had in their brief absence filled the ten-gallon kettle with water, warmed it carefully with hot water from a smaller kettle off the coals, and was holding the red-flannel bundle head downward in the tepid water.

Salita snatched the baby from the woman before she was fairly aware of her presence and stripped off the wrappings. A livid little body lay on her lap, with Cynthia Harkness looking reproachfully at her.

"I waited until you were out of sight. Why did you come back? This was the only thing to do. I saw you give your baby milk and you know Buddy needs all the milk. There will not be enough for two with the pasture dried up." She turned nonchalantly and sought her bed to sleep quietly while Salita, aided by tearful Mattie Lou, chafed the baby's little limbs and bathed him in hot water. At last he cried lustily

and both breathed sighs of relief. Milk and water given carefully from a teaspoon restored him to calm. He dropped asleep, and Salita, as she looked lovingly at him, resolved to protect him with her very life, if need be. Never again should this tiny, helpless morsel of babyhood be out of her sight until his mother recovered and gave him the loving care he deserved.

She sent Mattie Lou on flying feet after the boys, and then, weak and spent, lay down on a blanket in the stifling tent, with the baby hugged to her breast.

III

THE INDIAN RAID

Salita's first task when she arose was to write a letter to pin on the trunk of the willow tree for Joe Harkness if he should return. At first she was minded to begin the packing, but reasoned that she would be too far spent after finishing to pen the note. She put the baby down in the chair and crouched on the ground where she could keep an eye on him. Never again would she leave that child out of her sight.

Luke and Asahel came up shortly, driving the herd before them. First the family must be fed, and then through the night the fire kept going to cook the necessary food for the day's journey.

Luke agreed with her when she told him briefly of the happening of the afternoon. They must find medical attention for their mother. She pitied the boy as he listened in silence to her story, his face gray and drawn with his pent emotion, emotion that he was too proud to show. He felt that he was a man and men did not give way under strain.

They were perplexed about the wagons. Perhaps it would be best to leave one wagon with part of their goods, on the faint chance that the father would return and bring it on. But the Indians would likely

rifle everything as soon as they were gone. Luke thought that the oxen were rested enough to take one, and Salita's team could easily bear the strain of the other, at least until they reached Emigrant Springs, where they would be fairly certain to find other belated travelers. This camp, he thought, was not more than forty miles up the mountain, and they could probably reach it in three days' hard travel.

Mattie Lou could help Asahel with the herd. The sorrel mare, Garnet, was gentle and used to driving cattle. Luke would divide his time between the wagons and the herd, and Salita assured him that she would drive one wagon so as to keep an eye on the mother and the smaller children. All pulling together, they would make it unless accident overtook them.

The team was shod, so would not go lame on the hot stones. Luke spent the greater part of the night in fitting shoes ingeniously to the oxen, Bill and Shad. He had seen the work done by other emigrants with footsore cattle, and he reasoned that it was better to protect them before their feet became sore. Carefully he cut squares of tough elkskin and laid a generous application of hot tar and tallow on them. These he placed over their hoofs and tied them in place. There was vigorous protest as the hot poultices were applied, but when cool the mixture set and formed a hard shoe that could be depended upon to last for days over rough mountain trails.

By two in the morning the equipment was packed

and breakfast laid out. Salita urged Luke and Asahel to lie down for a couple of hours as she crept to bed, wondering how she could ever rise at four and make ready to turn out by five or six at the outside.

But youth is resilient. She slept soundly with the baby in her arms until Luke called her at four. Shivering with the chill of the early morning, she hastily built up the smoldering fire and helped Mattie Lou dress the sleepy children.

Mrs. Harkness, when told that they were to break camp, arose full of enthusiasm, and ate a good breakfast with the rest. By half past five the wagons were pulled up the hill to the trail and their months' long journey was resumed just as the sun showed over the eastern horizon.

The first day went well. The family was inured to travel in seething heat. The cattle moved rapidly, thanks to the long rest, though they found but little grass and no water except what was carried in every pot and bucket that could be pressed into service. The little heifer who gave the milk for the children failed woefully. Every precious drop had to be husbanded for Buddy and the new baby. The older children could manage very well with thin gruel sweetened with brown sugar.

Cynthia Harkness astonished Salita with her strength. At times she walked and led Sissy and Lemuel up the steep grades to save the load on the wagon. She ran ahead and spent the time thus

gained in gathering the wild arnica and the blue asters that grew sparsely along the trail. It seemed to Salita that an unaccountable store of physical strength had come to her with the loss of her reason. Never once did she complain nor mention her husband. The journey, to her, was a lark to be enjoyed just as the children did.

The first day they counted off a toll of fifteen miles. The next they made ten, reaching a spring at the foot of a long hill. Luke was for resting a day here in the shade. The cattle must not be forced. Before them stretched a fifteen-mile grade, and if possible they would reach the summit before making camp even if they were forced to travel by moonlight. This was the hardest stretch before Emigrant Springs. After that the going would be comparatively easy and the cooling shade would be grateful.

The baby fretted. Salita managed to soothe him in her arms as she drove the team or placed him in the seat beside her when her whole attention was needed. For brief intervals when the road was open Mattie Lou carried him carefully on the saddle in front of her.

The heat during the first two days was intolerable. The biting dust rose in clouds, making the eyes smart and the lips swell and bleed, but they forged ahead with the courage that desperation brings. Salita lost accord with her body. She was simply a thing of will, the will to save the Harkness family, and especially the tiny baby who somehow meant

more to her in his utter helplessness than the others. He was her especial charge, to save him her overwhelming purpose.

Asahel milked the heifer in the gathering twilight, but she gave little more than a pint of milk. The three small children begged for a drink of it. At first Cynthia Harkness gave no heed, but as the clamor increased she seized the small bucket from the resisting hands of the boy, spilling some of its precious contents. Resolutely she turned aside and, taking Buddy on her lap, put his lips to the foaming pail.

Salita attempted to reason with her, but she was obdurate. "You want it for your own baby," she said with unwonted heat. "I'll pour it on the ground first."

Luke, coming up, seized the bucket and saved a few teaspoonsful of its contents. Finding herself worsted, Cynthia Harkness retired to the wagon and undressed while she sang a silly ditty that she had learned in her girlhood, a rote song whose reiterated syllables had hammered on their tired eardrums through day and days together!

"One bright May morning John did go,
Down in the meadow for to mow.
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la ri,
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la.

"And as he mowed John did feel
The pizen of a sarpient a biting in the heel.
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la ri,
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la.

"They carried him home to mother dear,
Which made John feel so very queer.
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la ri,
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la.

"Then Johnny he gave up the ghost,
And straight to Jerusalem did post.
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la ri,
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la.

"Now all young men a warning take,
And don't get bit by a rattlesnake.
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la ri,
Tu rinke tu ri, tu ri la."

Salita warmed the scant supply of milk and, diluting it carefully, pieced it out with water off of toasted hardtack and fed the baby who was fretting and sucking his diminutive fists, when he was not wailing in fierce anger at life. She shook her head sadly. There was nothing but sweetened toast water for his night feeding, and she felt that tired flesh could not endure his crying through the night. It was useless to try to get any more milk from the jaded heifer, at least until morning. Asahel was a bone-dry milker. His father had taught him that art very early in life. To be careless about extracting the last drop was a sure way to dry up a cow, and a heifer, especially, must not form the habit of drying up before her natural period of lactation was over.

The night wore on tediously. Toward morning,

in desperation, Salita added a drop of brandy from the flask in the medicine chest and the baby slept.

Reluctantly Salita agreed to Luke's importuning to rest a day or two for the sake of the cattle. He argued that the heifer, especially, would benefit by cropping the grass about the little run. He would drive the other cattle farther off and allow her to take what sparse green she could near the camp. "You must keep a close watch on mother," he cautioned. "I'm terribly uneasy. No telling what she may take into her head to do next. The baby's a cute little beggar; we'll call him Joe after father. We must see him through until mother comes to her senses," he added bashfully, then turned to round up his flock.

The girl was grateful for the opportunity to wash. Here was mountain water, soft and cold. With Mattie Lou to help her she made the most of her cleaning. Ordinarily she hated washing, never having been obliged to do such hard tasks in her earlier days. "Slave's work," she had called it contemptuously to herself when necessity forced her to it after her father and mother and Mammy Rachel died and left the burden of the Harkness family on her young shoulders. Cynthia Harkness had not been brought up to work, either, and she was perfectly helpless. Some one must go ahead if the children were to be kept even passably clean.

This morning she fairly reveled in her work. They would probably find emigrants at the "Springs" and

they must appear as decent folks should, at their very best.

She kept an eye on Cynthia Harkness to make certain that she did not go near the baby who slept peacefully on his morning ration of warm milk.

Cynthia Harkness, in great good humor, amused Lemuel and Sissy, holding contented little Buddy in her lap. Salita noticed once that the children were deeply absorbed in something that their mother had given them to play with. She stepped cautiously near to see what it was. Lemuel, sitting on the ground, was taking gold pieces out of a money belt and putting them back in place. She had wondered about the money, trying to find it when she packed the goods, and had finally concluded that Joe Harkness must have taken it with him. Where Cynthia Harkness had secreted it she could not imagine, but here it was. The children were playing with ten-dollar gold pieces. She called Mattie Lou and told her to lure her mother up the ravine to gather flowers and then gave the children each a saucer of molasses, with hardtack to eat with it. In their absorption they did not notice her gathering up the money and restoring it to the belt. The pockets in which it was secured had been slit. She gathered up twenty pieces from the grass. Two hundred dollars in gold!

Hastily she sewed them in place and, retiring to the shelter of the wagon, placed the belt carefully around her waist, where her own money rested securely in its leather pouch.

The weight at first was almost intolerable, but she gloated over it. They would need money sorely before they reached the settlement. Her three hundred dollars and the ten horses that her father had left were her heritage. Before finding Joe Harkness's hoard she had intended to use it for the family if the need arose.

But in justice she felt that this remnant of her father's estate belonged solely to her. She was giving generous service to the Harkness family for the privilege of traveling with them.

Buoyed up by this sudden good fortune, she hastened to finish the washing, exulting in the warm suds against her bare brown arms. She would bathe the children in the warm water when she finished, and then perhaps if she hurried there would be time for a bath for herself.

She took the smeary children one by one and carefully washed the molasses from hands and face, just completing her task as Mattie Lou came up with her mother, who had wearied of her flower-gathering.

Mattie Lou obediently put the children to bed for their nap and Salita took the baby and retired up the ravine out of sight to bathe. At least they would all be fairly clean to make the start to Emigrant Springs. She took along a clean dress, rather tattered—she had intended to mend it, but had not found time—and filled with sudden relief at her ac-

complishments and their rare good fortune in finding the money, went about her ablutions.

As she was donning the last garment and buttoning the long waist down the front, commotion broke out in the camp, and she seized the baby and her soiled clothing and flew to set matters to rights.

Cynthia Harkness, tired with her morning ramble, had lain down to rest in the wagon. Mattie Lou was screaming wildly. The child always lost her head in a crisis. A small band of Indians surrounded the camp: five squaws, astride cayuse ponies, and a decrepit old brave supported by a young boy, were dismounting, gesticulating and talking to themselves in high glee. Here was a most excellent chance to pilfer with no men in sight.

They entered the wagon where the goods were stored and began opening up the boxes, sorting and admiring the clothing. Terror filled Salita. The Indians would kill them all, alone and defenseless as they were. They approached the line where the half-dry clothing flapped in the breeze and began laying the garments of their selection in a pile. The children's clothing they rejected with grunts of disapproval.

Salita tried to reason with them by signs and such few words of Chinook jargon as she could recall, but they thrust her angrily aside. A fat, lumbering squaw seized a huge butcher knife from the table and threatened her with it.

Pale with fright, Salita snatched it away from

her, and told the crying children to run to their mother—they had all emerged at once from the tent where they had been sleeping. Then unreasoning anger descended on the girl. She handed the baby to Mattie Lou and seized the squaw by the hair, shaking her fiercely. The wizened old beldame shrieked, but desisted, subsided rather weakly, in fact.

The screams brought Cynthia Harkness, wide-eyed from the wagon. Entirely unafraid, she walked up to the old man and began reasoning with him in English. Apparently he did not catch the import of her words, but he recognized the blank look in her eyes. "*Pelton, Pelton,*" he said to the squaws, pointing a finger to his head.

"You may take the clothing you have piled up," Cynthia Harkness told him gently. "We do not need so much, but you must go now and leave us alone. We are your friends. This is a *potlatch.*" [Gift.]

At the word *potlatch*, they brightened, and went about gathering up their plunder and lashing it to the ponies.

They gathered in a little knot a short distance away and held a powwow among themselves, and having come to a decision, the old squaw untied a deer that was lashed to one of the ponies and, cutting off the hind quarters, approached with smiles and bows to present it to Salita. In the best of humor the party mounted and trotted off down the road,

leaving Salita and Mattie Lou spent and trembling with the reaction from their panic.

When she could recover herself Salita took stock of their loss. All of her clothing except the tattered dress she wore was gone. With the exception of one suit of strong woolen goods the boys' and men's garments were left. The children had all of theirs, and Cynthia Harkness's Sunday dress and shoes and poke bonnet, that had been placed in the false bottom of the wagon because she did not expect to wear them until she reached the settlement, were intact.

The great loss was hers. What *would* she do? This tattered old dress would not last a week. Too bad she had seized the soiled one and taken it to camp with her at the alarm; it might have reposed still by the little stream if she had not acted according to her orderly habit. She cried bitterly. This was the last straw. No use to plod on farther against such heavy odds. All life was arrayed against her, anyway.

The baby added his tears to hers, and the children ran to her skirts for comfort. Mechanically she went about the never-ending task of warming milk to feed the baby, and then began dishing the beans from the pot. The hungry boys would be in to dinner any minute.

The work sobered her, as it always did. There was still so much cause for gratitude. If the cattle and horses had been in sight, no doubt they would all be dead and even traces of the camp obliterated. The Indians had had them in their power, but they

had lost only clothing. How thankful she should be. Didn't she have money to buy more clothing? Many of the emigrants were in worse straits for apparel than she was, and penniless besides. The boys were plainly frightened.

"I wish I'd bin here," Asahel blustered when they told him of the raid. "I can shoot father's gun, an' I'd 'a' filled 'em all full o' lead."

"Yes, you'd 'a' played hob, shootin' Injuns," Luke taunted. "I'll just carry father's gun in front of my saddle as usual. Young uns are always goin' off half-cocked. Mother saved our lives. Just what changed the minds of those Cayuses I can't understand."

"I simply gave them what they wanted," Cynthia Harkness told them with a glow of pride in her vacant eyes. I am not afraid of anything now. I used to be worried and fearful all the time, but the good Lord has opened my eyes. I have nothing to fear in the world."

Once the difficulty was over, Salita went about her camp duties; there was venison to be roasted before the fire. This would piece out the monotonous ration most beautifully. Luke and Asahel were for starting on in the morning. Camping alone beside the road was far too dangerous in the Indian country. They would seek company with all haste. Emigrant Springs could be reached in one long day, or at the most a day and a half, they hoped.

IV

SOUR DOUGH

With fear in their hearts they passed the night. Luke kept watch over the cattle, sitting against the bole of a tree with the gun on his knees until overcome by sleep. Salita was up the latter part of the night with the baby; she urged Luke to bed, saying there was no chance for sleep for her, anyway. She might as well keep a lookout. There was not much danger from a night visit from the Indians. Their usual habit was to attack at daylight.

With the first rays of light the family turned up the trail. There was a long day ahead of them. The night in the mountains had been chilly. Dew lay heavily on the grass and hung in glittering beads from the trees, dropping on them as they broke camp. The children wailed miserably with the cold and the break in their sleep, but by sunup spirits rose. There is comfort in brisk movement.

Until noon they traveled at a good pace, then the oxen slowed their gait on a sharp incline where a narrow rutted road led around the mountain.

"Down grade in two hours, now," Luke told Salita when she stopped to rest the cattle. "We'll make good time this afternoon."

The slow hours passed. The sun bore down piti-

lessly as mile after mile of the road lay behind them. Salita's wagon creaked and groaned. The wheels, dry as tinder, shrank, and dished outward. She halted at last to examine them; a tire was ready to fall off. She had caught it just in time.

Luke and Asahel worked for two hours wedging the tires on the wheels with whittled bits of hard wood, driving them in place with a hammer. At each blow it seemed that the shaking wagon would dissolve.

"No use," Luke finally admitted, wiping the sweat from his hot face with the sleeve of his coat. "We'll have to leave your wagon and pack our goods in the other. I thought I soaked those wheels in the spring until they would hold, but this heat would loosen anything."

He looked back down the long grade thoughtfully. "We need father," he admitted for the first time. "I feel like a man inside, but I guess I'm just boy, after all."

"You're a man, Luke," Salita assured him, but we need more than one man in a difficulty like this. "We'll unpack. No use carrying things we can get along without." With averted face she plunged into the wagon and began sorting out their belongings. The loss of the wagon was scarcely to be borne.

In another hour they pulled out with one heavily loaded wagon. The children and their mother walked to ease the strain on the oxen.

Haltingly they journeyed until swift mountain

dusk overtook them, then made a dry camp by the side of the road, too utterly weary to do more than the absolutely necessary camp chores before turning in to sleep.

Another day like the last. Another dry camp. The oxen were failing visibly, but surely before night they would reach Emigrant Springs.

Salita had toiled over the wagons and about the rough work of the camp until her dress was in tatters. "Why don't you take some of my clothes?" Luke urged at last. "We're about the same size."

The girl smiled at his lack of understanding. "Women do not wear men's clothing," she told him; "it isn't modest."

He grinned in masculine derision at the incomprehensible ideas of women. "Just as modest as those rags you've got on."

Salita blushed painfully and retired in haste to the wagon, fishing around in the jumbled clothing for an outfit. Luke's blue corded wool pantaloons fitted her. She found a red-flannel shirt, but discarded it in favor of a blue one. Red quarreled terribly with her carroty hair, she decided. There was an embarrassing gap between the top of the breeches and her shoes, a gap that showed her gray wool stocking. She found a pair of Asahel's cowhide boots and finally succeeded in drawing them on and tucking the nether garments snugly inside the tops.

When she finally descended from the wagon she was fully and decently clad in men's clothing. She

flushed under Luke's amused scrutiny, but went on about her business.

"You'll find breeches a sight handier in climbing in and out of the wagon," he said as he went off to tend the cattle.

"Any port in a storm," Salita called gayly after him.

Her sunbonnet was incongruous. She set a frayed hat of plaited straw on her mop of rather unkempt auburn hair and felt relief. She was fittingly clad. What was modesty in the face of cruel necessity? As soon as they made camp she would mend the old dress to wear when they approached the settlement. Folks on the trail would understand her predicament. If need be, she could explain the loss of her clothes to them.

Toward noon the next day the fainting cattle smelled water and quickened their pace. The way was easier now. They were traveling through a magnificent stand of heavy timber. Soon thin wisps of smoke showed against the blue of the sky. Joy! Oh joy! There were campers at Emigrant Springs.

Within an hour they were eagerly quaffing the clear icy water of the great spring. The cattle and horses almost stampeded in their eagerness to drink. They found a camping-spot and quickly unpacked the equipment. The campers crowded about to help, listening to their story and sympathizing with them in their distress.

A fire burned near a dilapidated wagon up the

hill. Salita, noticing a bent old woman smoking a short clay pipe near it, gathered up the fretful baby and carried him over to her. He had been suffering with the colic for the last few days, but she had not had time to heed him except to see that he was fed and safe from his mother.

"Well, alack-a-day!" the old woman ejaculated in a thin cracked voice, leaning hard on her cane and peering with little-seeing eyes at the bundle Salita carried. "Ye young mothers on the trail, God pity ye," she said as she stretched out withered arms for the baby.

Salita's eyes brimmed at her sympathy. The old woman did not heed. She was undoing the wrappings and stretching the cramped little limbs to the fire. "Why, he haint more'n a month old, scercely that!" she exclaimed in pity as she rubbed him into comfort.

Bit by bit Salita told the story of Cynthia Harkness's misfortune, and of her struggle to save the baby.

"Ye done grand. I'm a old 'oman, but I couldn't 'a' fed thet thar babby enny better, an' I bin a-bringin' babbies inter the worl' an' a-foldin' o' dead hands all my nateral life."

"Then you're a midwife?" Salita inquired eagerly. "I prayed and prayed that some one would be able to help poor Mrs. Harkness."

"I'm Granny Silcox. I've nussed the sick all over Missoury in my time," the old woman told her, tak-

ing the pipe for a moment from her toothless mouth and smoothing back her few locks of straggling gray hair. The top of her head was pink and bald like an old man's. Her nose and chin met, but love glowed in her deep-set eyes as she looked at Salita.

"There hain't much ennyone but the good Lord can do for a 'oman what's lost her recollection. Ef I'd jest 'a' bin thar, I could 'a' gi'n her stiff doses o' blue cohosh and 'a' seen her through. But I dunno, God air merciful ter mothers sometimes. Her body'll gain strength when she mind beant all the time a-sappin' o' hit."

"Yes," Salita agreed. "I never saw her so strong and well. She sleeps like a child and travels easier than any of us."

"She'll git roses inter her cheeks and fat on her bones now God hez washed the trouble outen her head," Granny Silcox said thoughtfully. "I mind many a mother in like case. Sometimes it's y'ars afore they comes to theirselves; sometimes they never does."

"Then you can't help her now?" Salita voiced her disappointment in a low whisper.

"Jes' leave her be ontil the good God brings back her senses," Granny admonished her gently, turning to the baby on her lap.

Salita bent to examine the baby with her. "He's a pretty little fellow and strong, isn't he?" she asked anxiously.

"Jes' lookit thet red curly hair an' them sturdy

little laigs. You allus tell how a babby air a-growin' by his laigs. He'll pull through the winter ef the grass ez good."

"I'm thankful for that," Salita said gratefully, watching Granny as she eased the comfortable baby to the hollow of her bony shoulder. "Tell me what to do for colic, please. I'm nearly worn out for sleep."

"Granny'll keep keer o' the baby fer ye tonight. I don't need much sleep. The night ez jest a time for harberin' old grudges an' sorrers. Jest ye rest once, all night through, gal. Hit'll do ye a heap o' good."

Salita's eyes filled with her tears as she thanked Granny. Human kindness touched her strangely. For so many weary weeks she had fought her battle alone.

"Ye got flour," Granny inquired. "I'll give ye a startin' o' sour dough. Ye kin bake a batch o' biscuits fer ter celebrate yer arrival."

Salita agreed happily and set off for her camp with a quart of rather sour, evil-smelling starter. Never mind, she would sweeten the dough with saleratus. They had brought a good-sized sack from the soda springs back on the plains. Oh, life was good after all! She hummed the first tune in months as she got out the Dutch oven and prepared the coals. First she would let her dough set awhile and the children would have the biscuits with molasses for supper.

Luke and Asahel came up after seeing that the cattle and horses were safe in the meadow back of the springs.

"Good pasture, too," Luke gloated to her as she filled a wooden mixing bowl with flour and made a depression in it to hold the thin sponge that she had mixed with flour and water.

"One thing I don't just like, though; there's a lot of rough men here in camp. The emigrants say they have a herd of horses farther up in the mountains. One big lummox wanted to trade me out of your little sorrel mare. Said she was wind-broken and not worth much. Would probably die on our hands before we reached the settlement. I told him that the horses belonged to you. He said he'd soon see about that. A woman had no business with property. I didn't like the way he talked about women. Father never allowed a man to speak lightly about his womenfolks. We'd best be careful. They're quarrelsome. Called me a fool brat when I told him I couldn't talk trade with him. Told me I was tied to a woman's apron-string, only she was a slut that wore men's clothing instead of an apron tied around her waist.

"Oh, well, he'll not bother us," Salita comforted, stirring the batter with her little finger to test the amount of saleratus needed. The reference to her clothing nettled her, though. How she did wish she had a whole dress to wear, but she tossed her head and told herself that if she conducted herself like a

lady no one would molest her. Perhaps Granny Silcox had an extra dress and she could trade her a pound of black tea or something else for it. She meant to ask her as soon as she finished with her biscuits and put them to rise.

Asahel called to Luke and he set off toward the pasture, to hobble the horses for the night, thankful that here they would not need to guard their stock. He, too, was in need of an unbroken night's rest. His thin body showed gaunt through his flannel shirt, but he held his shoulders straight. No slumping for Luke Harkness when he had a man's responsibility to carry.

"Keep your tongue between your teeth," Salita called to him, and he nodded without turning.

Cynthia Harkness had taken the children and was wandering among the camps. Three or four families were resting at the springs. Mattie Lou was in the seventh heaven. Salita thought of calling her to help with the supper, but she was happily making a playhouse with another little girl her own age, and the poor child had so little time to play that she could not bring herself to interrupt her.

They had purposely pitched their camp a little to one side of the spring, well below the others. Salita's clothing was so disreputable that she courted seclusion; the dress, she decided, was past mending.

She fairly reveled in the immediate silence, with soothing human sounds coming to her from the dis-

tance. Absently she stirred her thin batter with a meditative little finger. No need for hurry. They were safe. For the first time since her parent's death she felt almost happy.

A step aroused her from her reverie. A man stood near her; a tall uncouth man with ten days' black stubble on his chin, a stubble yellow at the mouth with tobacco juice. His knees, bent in his buckskin breeches, looked as if they had succumbed to the effort of keeping his body up. His shoulders slouched. Indolence was written in every line of his hulking being. He leered at her and his teeth were brown stubs stained with his ceaseless chewing of the quid.

"Evenin' miss, er is it missus?" he volunteered by way of introduction, shifting from one uneasy leg to the other.

"Good afternoon," Salita greeted him politely. No use in being rude just because she revolted from the chance presence of the man.

"I aim ter pull outen yere in the mornin'." The man was ill at ease but somehow determined. "I 'low thet you an' me might hitch up. I hearn that ye have no folks. Whut's the use o' wearin' o' yore purty se'f ter the bone a-tendin' a passel o' brats. Ye're too peart a gal fer that."

Taking Salita's horrified silence for encouragement, he came a step closer. Still she did not speak, simply gazed at him out of wide, uncomprehending eyes.

"We c'u'd marry when we git ter the settlement, er not, as ye pleased; no one 'u'd be the wiser. Folks minds their own bizness in new kentrys. Thet band o' horses o' yours c'u'd be managed ter right smart advantage ef I had 'em," he went on, a little embarrassed by Salita's prolonged silence.

"Ye're a right purty gal." He seized her by both wrists by way of hurrying his wooing, and leered down at her as she threw her head back in a frantic effort to evade his kiss. For a moment she stood passively, collecting all her strength, then with a mighty effort wrenched her wrists from his grasp. He drew back in surprise. Courting to him was a brief matter.

Before he realized what she was about Salita had seized the wooden bowl of dough and thrown its contents over his head. The batter filled his hair and oozed into his eyes. It streamed down the neck of his open shirt. It filled his gaping mouth, while for an instant the girl stood facing him, a blazing white fury.

"So you'd lay your dirty hands on me, would you?" she asked at last with a scorn that was searing even to a case-hardened courter.

Wildly he clawed the sour-smelling dough from his eyes, and with an oath that roused the camp made for the spring. His two companions had waited in the shadow of the trees to witness the result of his wooing. He had boasted openly of his conquests, and promised that he would have no difficulty in taking

the "red-headed gal" and her hosses with him when he broke camp next morning.

The whole camp had assembled by now, and were unmercifully chaffing him in his discomfiture.

"Got the wust of it, didn't ye, Hank?" a tall Missourian asked solicitously.

"Hank, hain't pappy telled ye often enuf not ter be so brash with yer courtin' o' a red-headed gal? Slow an' aisy like, that's my motter," a bewhiskered old man drawled.

"Ye remin' me o' Santa Claus, Hank," another remarked with a slow drawl. "Does ther batter taste lak hit smells, I want ter know?"

But Hank was busy with his profanity and a futile effort to wash the slimy paste off his head and face. Not a hand was lifted to assist him. They prolonged the situation for their enjoyment.

"The dirty strumpet!" I'll git even with her fer this, ef it takes the balance o' my naturel life." Shaking his fists toward the camp, he made off, followed by a laughing crowd of men.

Like a sleep-walker Salita stood where her would-be wooer had left her. She roused at the ribald jests of the men, going red and white by turns.

So now that she was alone in the world strange men could take liberties with her, could they? she asked fiercely. Cynthia Harkness, too, was alone and unprotected, more at the mercy of men in her simplicity than she was. At least she had all her senses.

With set teeth she made her way at last to the

wagon, and after a time emerged with her father's pistol in a holster at her belt. Let a man so much as look at her and she would fill him full of holes. From this day on men were her natural enemies. She would show them whether they dared lay their unholy hands on her or molest Cynthia Harkness in her helplessness. Unnerved, at last she lay down on the bed in the tent and sobbed herself to sleep.

The fretting of the children for their supper did not rouse her. She heard Mattie Lou trying to warm the beans and give the children their evening meal. Poor patient little Mattie Lou with her two tight braids and her gentle, anxious face, she was sorry to leave the work for her, but she did not stir, just lay face downward on the bed, fingering the pistol at her belt.

She was a defenseless woman alone in a world of ruffians. Her flesh burned where the man had touched her. Feebly she rubbed her wrists to wipe off the stain. Even the baby was forgotten in her misery.

A simple, trusting girl had come hopefully into the camp at Emigrant Springs; a woman with her thin lips set in a taut line lay prone on the bed through the night.

V

TREACHERY

The first sharp edge of her anger and humiliation worn off, Salita slept. She was practical. One who carries heavy responsibilities must not spare time for brooding. Knowing the baby was safe and comfortable with Granny Silcox meant that she would not have to stir once through the long quiet night.

She resolved that the first thing in the morning she would see if she could manage to trade for a dress, so as to enter the settlement in decorous garb. Luke's clothing would have to answer on the trail, no matter what unknowing folks had to say about her.

The campers arose early, as was their habit. The cattle and horses must be attended to and the usual routine carried out, even though they might lounge around the fires through the middle of the day.

Salita hurried over as soon as she saw Granny Silcox stirring about. Granny was an incumbrance, or considered so, by a shiftless daughter-in-law who loved her ease, especially in the morning.

Granny was raking out the coals preparatory to starting up her breakfast fire, groaning as the rheumatism twinged in the chill air. "Mornin', Saleety," she greeted her, leaning heavily on her cane

as she turned from the fire. "The babby slept plumb through the night. Never give me a mite o' trouble, once I upended him fer ter ease his colic. Did ye know ter hold a colicky baby by the feet fer a bit when curds settles like in his stummick?" she inquired. "All ye gotta do fer that babby is ter keep his knees warm, and ye'll tote him through ter the settlement 'ithout botheration."

Salita nodded. She was glad to know the old Granny's remedy for baby ills.

Granny evidently had other matters to discuss and welcomed the opportunity before the others were up and about the camp. "I talked a spell yistidday with Mrs. Harkness, pore simple soul," she told Salita in a whisper. "She don't recollect a thing o' what's happened, but she'll come ter herself in time. She'll like ez not take on second sight, an' know things thet right folks don't. God gives strange gifts when he takes the understandin' fer a time. Ye keep yer dander up, gal; things'll break plumb right fer ye."

Salita somehow felt braced by Granny's assurance. She lifted her chin and threw back her shoulders, standing straight and tall in her boots and trousers with the flannel shirt open at the neck because the band was a bit tight.

"I wish ye had a dress ter wear, gal. Them britches cause men ter pass remarks, but I cain't help ye none; no one here hez a garment they kin spare. Hit'll be a

case o' anything ter cover nakedness afore we-all gits ter the settlement."

"I hoped some one would have a dress that I could trade for tea or something," Salita said in disappointment.

Granny shook her head. "I hear ye got the best o' Hank yistidday. Too bad ter waste a good bakin' o' dough on the like o' him, with flour ten dollars a hundred, but ye teached him a needed lesson. Ye'll hold yer own with any passel o' men, Saleety. There's allus low-lifes who'll take advantage o' a woman 'ithout menfolks on the plains and everwhars. Ye jist make um keep thar distance."

"I intend to," Salita assured her grimly, with a hand on the gun at her belt.

"Ye'd best keep a sharp eye on Mis' Harkness, too. She'll like ez not need pertection, an' men don't never pay much attention ter young boys, onless they kin feed their vanity an' git somethin' outen 'em fer nothin'. Ye'd best warn Luke not ter do much talkin'. Hank an' his crowd hain't no good. Some o' the emigrants air a-thinkin' they didn't come by that thar bunch o' horses honestly. I dunno. I dunno. I allus hate ter suspicion anyone, but ye keep a right sharp lookout. Hank haint no call ter feel good will ter ye." She threw back her head and cackled shrilly at the recollection of yesterday's happenings.

Salita flushed to the roots of her red hair, and opened her mouth to speak, but shut it again grimly.

No use explaining. Granny understood the situation perfectly.

"I wish I had a dress, though," she said at last. "I'll be taken for a loose woman in these clothes."

"Ye never mind, honey," Granny comforted. "All ye need ez the answer o' a good conscience, ez the Book sez. Ye air a-doin' yer best, an' honest folks wun't jedge ye harshly, no matter what others think. Ye jist do right accordin' ter yer lights."

Salita did not answer, but as she turned to go Granny called after her. "I'm aimin' ter nuss the babby, an' fat him up a little while ye're in camp. Don't take no more worry erbouten him. I'm nigh on ter eighty an' I cain't do much more kindnesses in this ole worl'. I'll take joy in tendin' him while ye rest up a mite."

Salita thanked her gratefully, turning and throwing her strong young arms about the old woman before she hurried to her camp to rouse the children and prepare the breakfast. How much genuine kindness there was among simple folks. She would do a lot of work now that the baby was off her mind for a day or so.

Luke came in with the milk. The little heifer was picking up already. The boy showed his relief. The emigrants had told him that once cattle reached the Blue Mountains there was no further danger of their weakening through starvation. They would press on in a day or so. He could see no use in waiting on the chance that his father might overtake them. With

the fatality of youth he seemed to have given up all hope that his father was alive, and his immediate concern now was to reach the settlement with the family.

Salita had intended to tell him of finding the money belt that his mother had given the children, but thought better of it, though she knew that the family finances were worrying the boy. If he didn't know of it he couldn't tell it. Usually he was close-mouthed, but there was no telling what information inquisitive men might pump out of an unsuspecting boy. No, she would keep the matter to herself. They might be robbed if there was the faintest notion that they carried money with them. The emigrant trail brought out the worst in men if they had any bad in them.

As she worked sorting out the goods in the wagon she kept an eye on the camp of Hank and his companions. She was too far away to be sure just what they were doing, but activities seemed to point to their breaking camp. At least they had rounded up their horses, and that was a hopeful sign, she decided.

Toward noon they drove off with the dilapidated wagon creaking as they made the road that led westward. They called back something derisive as they departed, but she gave no heed. At least she was safe now from further trouble from Hank and his cohorts.

Luke and Asahel, coming in to dinner, told her

that Hank had kept out of sight since his affray with her. The men said it served him good and right, her turning that batch of sour dough over his head, but Salita had nothing to say.

Cynthia Harkness was happy as a child in the emigrant camp. She took the three little children wherever she went. Granny Silcox had evidently spread her pitiful story abroad, for she was kindly received. Mattie Lou was not much help; so absorbed was she in her play that Salita had not the heart to call her. "Poor child!" she mused. "There will be so much for her to do when we take the road that I'll just let her enjoy herself while she can."

Salita sought no acquaintances. She felt diffident on account of her clothes, and the women, with tacit consent, let her alone. Granny Silcox had told her story, too. But toward evening of the second day a kind woman sent Mattie Lou home with a generous batch of light, puffy sour-dough biscuits that she had baked in her Dutch oven. It was hard for the proud girl to accept the offering, but the children clamored for the warm bread, so there was nothing to do but swallow her pride and dish out molasses to eat with it.

A young man in the company began fiddling as dark settled over the quiet hills. Every one repaired immediately to his camp to sing. Salita's lips quivered as she sat against a tree alone, listening to the shrill strains of "Money Musk" and "Turkey in the Straw," but nothing could have drawn her to the

laughing assembly. She told herself bitterly that she was done with gayety. Life was just a grim struggle, with nothing but sorrow and heartache for its reward. Soon she would be old like Granny Silcox, and no one should know or care how lonely she was nor what she had missed out of life.

The next day wore away, too, with nothing but camp drudgery for her. Luke thought they had better move on in the morning. The men had helped him soak the wheels of the wagon in the stream, so that there would be no more trouble with the tires loosening.

There were Indians about the encampment all day long. The emigrants had had all they could do to watch them against their pilfering. But every one had traded with them. The camp fairly reveled in the fresh venison and dried salmon that they had to offer. They were harmless, inoffensive squaws, even if they did peer into the wagons and poke inquisitive fingers into the cooking.

The children came trooping in to supper, tired with their play. Cynthia Harkness went to the wagon to lie down before they missed Sissy. Salita, but little alarmed, sent Mattie Lou to hunt for her, thinking that she was at one of the camps, but no one had seen her since afternoon, when the squaws had asked one of the men at the camp up the hill for the little girl. He had jokingly told them they might have her for all he cared, then had dismissed the matter and gone out after his cattle.

There was general indignation at the foolishness of the man. Anyone should know better than to joke with Indians, who never jested, but took every statement in earnest and at its face value.

The Indians had moved on toward sundown, but in which direction no one could say. Salita was panic-stricken when she heard the news, but gained courage as the men organized a party and started to scour the timber with pine torches. They threatened to lynch the man who had made the idle jest. He had hastily gathered up his effects and moved on with his sober family while the men were out scouting for Sissy, but the harm had been done. The Indians had stolen Sissy.

"Ef the Injuns took the chile, we may bring erbout a massacree ef we try to fetch 'er back," Granny Silcox's lanky son had declared before they set off, "but we gotter chance hit. I got brats o' my own, en I'd risk ennythin' to save 'em from the Injuns."

The party returned in the early morning hours with grim faces. Poor little Sissy with her tangled yellow ringlets and her dirty little molasses-smeared face had vanished completely, leaving not the faintest clue to her whereabouts.

Salita and Luke and Asahel ran about calling her at first, then realizing there was nothing they could do, had brought the herd up to the camp. Their mother, her nap over, descended from the wagon and casually asked what the fuss was all about. Salita told her briefly, expecting tearful reproaches.

Cynthia Harkness, though she started at the story, said nothing, but sat for a long time with her head in her hands, refusing to speak when the women offered comfort.

Salita crept to Granny Silcox to sob out her misery, and the old woman gathered her to her bony old breast. "Hit's the good Lord's will, looks lak," she quavered, having no comfort to offer. "I feel in my ole bones thet you-all will git that thar chile back safe an' soun', but don' ask me how, I know, fer I cain't tell ye."

Salita made her way back to their camp after hugging the baby and telling him in a whisper of her terrible grief. She had so often been impatient with Sissy. She had thought her a very troublesome child, but now she could see only shining virtues in the little girl. Over and over she reproached herself for allowing the children to run wild about the camp grounds. She should have charged Mattie Lou to keep an eye on them. Their poor mother was not responsible.

After sleeping a few hours the men would search all the next day. A blight had fallen on Emigrant Springs. Women moved about their work with the strain showing in their faces, or suddenly threw their aprons over their heads and vanished into the wagons. Only mothers know the agony of another mother for a child lost in the mountains or, worse still, stolen by the Indians.

Cynthia Harkness alone was calm. She sat quietly

by the fire, not speaking when sympathetic women came up to comfort her. "We'll find her when we take the trail again," she assured the grieving women, who exchanged knowing glances.

The men gave only the necessary attention to the herds that day, before they set off to scour the mountains in search of the Indians. Stern, resolute men they had become, each with a loaded gun before him on the saddle. They meant to take the child by force if necessary, but God only knew what the result would be if they aroused the Cayuse Indians. Since the Whitman massacre in '46, everyone in the country had been fearful of them.

That night the cattle were left to their own devices; the men had not returned. Luke and Asahel had gone with them, so Salita drove up the little heifer and did the milking, tethering her near the camp so that she would not be obliged to trail through the dewy grass after her in the chilly morning.

She was uneasy about the cattle and horses, but lay down to rest finally, with anxious ears strained for the return of the men. Sleep did not come. She dressed and made her way out to the horses. They were lying down. She took the hobbles off her little sorrel mare, Garnet, and with gentle pats and assurances led her into camp by her mane. Garnet would be company for her through the night, anyway. After tethering her to the wagon, she lay down again. The women, most of them, were up, keeping the fires going, or gathering in knots to discuss their

anxieties. The camp was quiet in the early morning, and finally she slept. The return of the men wakened her: she knew before they spoke that their search had been fruitless; their very silence was ominous.

She rose to help with the hot meal that was in preparation for them, saying nothing. There was nothing to do or say. Sissy was gone. She might as well accept the fact and carry on as best she could. All her grief came back to her as the boys ate and crept into bed.

The camp stirred late. The sun was up and shining warmly after the sharp frost of the night before they went to attend the cattle.

Salita rose reluctantly, thinking she would milk the heifer without waking the boys. She had finished before she thought of Garnet. Garnet was gone! She had not missed her. The rope was cut through. A sharp knife had been used; the strands were not frayed. Some one had stolen up while she slept.

She ran to the Silcox camp. Pete Silcox had risen and was rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He came on the run when he heard her story, then went to arouse the other men. Hastily they hurried to the pasture where the cattle were. They were grazing quietly, but not a horse was in sight. Salita had lost the entire ten head. No one else had suffered. But they had now just their cattle and the oxen that drew their wagons.

VI

TRAVEL! TRAVEL! TRAVEL!

EXCLAMATIONS of indignation did not help the situation. Salita was the loser, but she had the least to say. This did not point to Indian work. They would have, more than likely, taken the cattle as well.

"Hank an' his dirty crew is at the bottom o' this piece o' devilment," Pete Silcox declared, and the other men were inclined to agree with him.

"I thought strange thet they would start off in the middle o' the day," one old man volunteered, spitting tobacco juice with a squirt through his snags of teeth. "Liker'n not they jest went out o' sight in some o' them gullies, and waited till the men war off in search o' the leetle gal."

"They likely stole Sissy just ter 'tice us outen hearing," Pete Wilcox ventured.

Cynthia Harkness spoke up. She had been listening quietly to their talk for some time. "We'll find Sissy when we take the trail, but the horses are gone for good. Hank just waited his chance to get even with Salita. She loses her temper and gets us all into trouble. She's paid for it this time with ten head of horses."

The men exchanged glances and tapped their heads significantly as a sympathetic woman led Mrs.

Harkness to her camp on the pretext of giving her a warm breakfast.

Luke's jaw was set in a straight, firm line. "If we stay here longer we may lose our cattle," he told Salita, and she agreed with him. The camp had suddenly become intolerable to her. Granny Silcox had said that women whose minds were blank sometimes knew by intuition. Hope sprang up in her heart. They might find Sissy, as her mother declared. At least she would cling desperately to that slender hope.

She hurried with her packing, while Luke and the men put the wheels on the wagon. Anything is better than idleness when the heart is bowed down with sorrow. They must keep on the move.

The other families assured them that they would follow in the morning. They were safe enough alone, if they kept a guard over their cattle, but the season was wearing on, they must all be pushing westward. This company was the fag end of the emigration and winter would catch them if they did not travel. They reminded the Harkness family of Dr. Whitman's simple formula for crossing the plains—"Travel! Travel! Travel!"

Salita's composure deserted her when she went to Granny Silcox for the baby. She had taken Granny at her word and scarcely given him a thought the last few days. His color was better and his little face seemed filled out with his brief period of rest and quiet.

The girl threw both arms about the old woman and hugged her to her breast before she turned to the waiting oxen. She would walk and drive them, while the boys drove the cattle. The loss of their horses would slow up their traveling terribly; they had no time to lose.

The other immigrants had been thoughtful in urging them to start half a day ahead. This allowed them to keep close to the road with their cattle. There had been but little travel for a few weeks and the grass was fair. There would be the necessity of ranging back a mile or so on both sides of the road when the others camped at night.

The baby was a load of lead against Salita's breast, but she found her only comfort in his weight. Life was a dull, colorless fabric shot through with hot threads of anguish. The loss of Sissy was intolerable. Nothing mattered. They would just plod through burning dust-filled days, and sleep, the dull insensibility of over-weary bodies, would divide one stretch of exhausting travel from the next.

But the way at the start was cool and calming. Four and a half miles had been covered before they left the heavy timber, magnificent yellow pines and balsam firs stretching fold on fold north and south, that would have filled Salita with solemn joy at another time, but now she trudged doggedly on beside the oxen, though with bodily activity the tumult in her mind abated somewhat.

Mattie Lou came running back for a bucket, leav-

ing the cattle to graze. She had found a patch of bright yellow currants. They would have them stewed with molasses for supper. A deer with her fawn leaped up from a grassy covert at their approach. A couple of miles farther on Luke succeeded in killing a large buck—the first he had ever brought down. He trembled as the wagon halted while he clumsily skinned and dressed it. They were grateful; the fresh venison would last them for days. The children, as children are wont to do, had simply accepted life and forgotten its sorrows.

Cynthia Harkness, too, was happy to be on the way. She placed Buddy in the wagon when he fell asleep and ran ahead with little Lemuel, gathering the wayside flowers. Salita told herself that she was glad that the poor thing had no power to feel any more. Fiercely she envied her the luxury of forgetfulness.

Grandeur fairly took the girl off her feet as they emerged from the timber, their faces turned expectantly to the west. An upland plain met the gentle rolling slopes of the Blue Mountains, a vast plain, yellow in the slanting afternoon sun, and still farther on the serried Cascade Mountains stood draped in an ethereal blue mist. Salita lost herself for the moment in her rapt gazing. Beyond those tree-covered slopes lay the settlement. Surely, after all, life held something for her. Weary as she had been, the weight fell from her. "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, whence cometh my strength," she murmured.

Surely there was strength in the mountains, and if there were not happiness beyond, at least there was work to be done. She would find her joy in duty. She smiled a little at the platitude and then urged the oxen on.

The great white peak towering above the lesser mountains must be Mount Hood. They were to travel clear round it. The other side presented itself to the settlement, so she had heard. It seemed to her that her journey at last was nearing its end, though she knew that they had at least two hundred miles of hard going yet to accomplish. Distance in the clear air was deceiving. From the point where she stood she would have said that they would cross the middle-distance and reach the base of the mountain in a few hours.

She glanced down to where the Umatilla River emerged from the Blue Mountains to travel leisurely to join the Columbia. They would camp as soon as they came to water. She must attend to the venison. They would have venison steaks for supper; perhaps she could spare a cup of milk to put in the gravy; 'twould give it color, anyway, and make them feel as if milk were plentiful. Mattie Lou came up with her little pailful of luscious yellow currants. Cynthia Harkness had a quantity in her hat, holding it high to keep little Lemuel from reaching his grimy hands into it.

Camp that evening was a cheerful place. "We'll find Sissy tomorrow," Cynthia Harkness told them

with conviction, as she put her saucer of stewed currants aside. "I'm saving mine for her. The poor child hasn't tasted fruit this whole summer."

Another long day with no sign of a traveler. They had been told before leaving the camp that they must make a forced march in order to reach water the next night. A shallow ford of the winding Umatilla was the customary camping-place. Nine o'clock and a rather dark cloudy night brought them to a slight rise where they could see camp fires in the distance. The oxen quickened their lagging pace, as they always did when water was scented.

But as they drew near they were filled with apprehension. Tepees made of buckskin took the place of the covered wagons they had expected to see. In the darkness they had come right up to a good-sized Indian encampment. There was no turning back. The activity about the village told them at once that their approach had been noticed.

Fearfully they paused at a little distance. There was nothing to do now but stop for the night and make a show of bravado if the Indians disturbed them. Cynthia Harkness walked boldly off in the direction of their camp, and Luke, in terror, followed to try to coax her back. Indignantly she commanded him to return to the wagon, and the boy, accustomed from infancy to obey his parents, came back meekly.

"It's just as well," Salita comforted him. "The Indians did not harm your mother when they came

upon us on the road. She seems to have some mysterious power over them. We'll just wait awhile and see what happens, before we decide what to do."

Quaking with fear, Luke nodded. They looked at each other with blanched faces, their terror accentuated by the flickering candle which Salita had ventured to light. There was no use in secrecy. The candle might help to convince the Indians that they were not afraid.

The baby woke and screamed his desire for food. Salita fumbled among the bedding for the stone jar of hot water that she always carried so that his milk would be warm. She had learned long ago the value of keeping water hot in the wagon. So often it was impossible to kindle a fire on the road, and many a baby had died from being obliged to take his milk cold. A jug filled with boiling water in the morning would keep hot until night if carefully wrapped.

The children awoke and fretted. It seemed to Salita that their noise would drown the sleeping land. She expected every minute that the Indians would swarm out of their tepees and make an attack upon them. Soon there was a wild stir in the camp. Dogs barked and braves shouted to one another during the tense minutes that they waited, Salita fed the baby with spoon and cup, her hand trembling so that she was afraid of spilling the precious milk before it reached his mouth.

The din about the camp increased. They were sure the savages were about to descend upon them for

massacre. The clouds dispersed a little and the full moon rode high in the heavens. At least they would have partial light for a time. Luke decided he had best unyoke the oxen and allow them to rest until morning—no use in attempting escape; if the Indians meant them harm they could easily overtake them in a few minutes, and besides, they would not leave without their mother, even if the very worst came.

Like water wearing away the solid rock the minutes ate into the night. The sounds at the camp went on, but they could not distinguish a word that was said there, though shouts and screams rent the air from time to time.

After a period of waiting that the girl and boy thought would never end the din ceased and in the dim light they saw two figures emerging from the camp. They waited their approach in tense expectancy. Cynthia Harkness was coming, and behind her was an Indian leading three heavily laden ponies.

"I have found Sissy," the mother called joyfully, as she neared. They ran to meet her, and there was the little girl, astride one of the ponies. Her hair was matted about her head and the small face that was always smeared with molasses and grime was now overlaid with grease from the fishskins she had been chewing.

The Indian lifted her from the horse, and she ran to them with a glad cry.

"I knew she was in the camp," Cynthia Harkness

explained. "They did not want to give her up, said they had found her crying on the trail, but this Indian told me to take her and I did."

The Indian paid no heed. He was carefully unloading buckskin sacks from the horses. When at last he had finished to his satisfaction, he turned to Luke. "Make-um camp. Indians no hurt. Me fliend. Me Wyonoshut. Me lead-um settlement."

Sissy's story came out bit by bit. She had been playing about the camp during the afternoon of her disappearance. She admitted reluctantly that she had gone off alone, against orders, to pick flowers, and a bad man had picked her up and put his hand over her mouth to stop her crying and carried her off to a wagon. "It was the man you threw the dough on," she told Salita. "He went off in the wagon, then he came back and got me when no one was looking. He kept me in the wagon until the next day, and when we came here he put me out in the road and the wagon went on. I'm sorry now I didn't mind you, Salita, and stay with the children. I'll never be bad again." Sissy was all contrition.

"Your bad temper made all the trouble, Salita," Cynthia Harkness chided gently. "When will you learn to control it?"

Salita made no answer. Her relief at regaining Sissy overwhelmed her. So Hank had taken his revenge. Perhaps that was what he called to her as they drove out of camp.

Luke had been slowly turning the matter over in his mind. "They took Sissy just to throw the men off," he declared. "It was easy to come back and steal our horses."

"Yes," his mother agreed, "they just drove off into the timber as soon as the turn in the road took them out of sight, and waited. You've had your lesson, Salita. The young learn only by bitter experience."

"I'm thankful that we only lost the horses," Salita said with humility. "I couldn't have borne to have disaster come to Sissy through my folly."

"You're not to blame, Salita." Luke defended her hotly. "Hank got his due, and if I ever see him I'm going to rid the country of him. No man can badger my womenfolks and get away clear, even if I am only a boy. I ain't through with Hank and his crowd, you just mark my words."

"Make-um camp." Wyonoshut had grown impatient at the talk. "You safe. Indians no hurt. Wyonoshut make-um wawa, skookum wawa [good talk] in morning."

Reassured and happy, Salita set about arranging the beds. Somehow she trusted the Indian. At least he spoke enough English to make himself understood.

Luke, tired as he was, was preparing to stand guard over the cattle, but the Indian ordered him curtly to bed.

Cynthia Harkness crept to rest with Sissy hugged tight in her arms, and peace descended on the Harkness family, and joy such as they had not experienced for long weary months descended upon their camp.

VII

THE WILLOW CREEK TRADING-POST

Wyonoshut proved to be an early riser. So were the Indians in the camp. Long before the Harkness family were ready to receive visitors the squaws swooped down upon them, poking into the pot where breakfast was cooking, and examining the wagon and the goods spread about.

Mrs. Harkness met them with the utmost friendliness. They stood in awe of her, desisting their prying when she reproved them, tapping their heads significantly and murmuring: "Pelton, Pelton." Salita had no time to bother with them, but went about the usual routine of morning duties, aided by Wyonoshut, who from time to time spoke words of sharp rebuke to them, at which they fell back.

Half a dozen bucks joined them a little later, and the whole band gathered in a knot a few paces off to discuss the situation with gutturals and much gesturing. "Give-um *potlatch*," Wyonoshut finally suggested to Salita, in desperation as they made their demands upon him: "They *tillicums*. No fight-um. No kill-um."

The whole band listened intently for the effect of his words upon Salita and Luke, and seeing that

they were about to assent to the bestowal of a gift, signified that a young steer was what they desired.

Luke demurred at this, but Salita wavered. Perhaps it was best to give up the steer. They would have nine head left. One steer was a small price to pay for a little girl. She had planned to give them one of the cooking-pots and some of the goods from the wagon that she knew they must leave somewhere by the road soon to relieve the oxen. Cynthia Harkness insisted upon the steer and added a gallon of molasses and some rice. She argued that the oxen they were driving and a pair of half-broken young steers would be necessary to draw the wagon. This left them the young heifer and a cow that would freshen in late September or early October, besides three likely yearlings.

Wyonoshut was busily engaged with his sacks while the dickering went on. He had emptied the contents on the ground and was sorting his *ictas* (possessions), of which he had a prodigious array. An accumulator was Wyonoshut. He had old cooking-pots, stray pieces of ragged clothing, bits of old iron, hatchets and other tools, a bag of rice and one of beans, and, strangest of all, two Bibles such as the missionaries issued to the Indians.

As his friends went off happily with the steer, he finished his sorting and signified to the astonished family his intention of traveling in their company to the settlement. He wished to stow his goods in the

wagon so as to leave the ponies free for driving the cattle.

In vain Luke and Salita argued with him to discard at least part of his possessions, but he was adamant on that point. They ended by giving him his way. Wyonoshut possessed great powers of persuasion.

The Indians came surging back with fresh salmon that they had speared in the riffles of the Umatilla. They had just camped to cure their winter supply of fish and were on their journey homeward, somewhere in the dry interior, for these were the Cayuses who had their winter lodges in the sagebrush country between The Dalles and the Blue Mountains.

Two hours of arduous packing and stowing were necessary before Salita and Luke could find space to accommodate the buckskin sacks of junk, but finally Wyonoshut grunted his satisfaction and they set forth with the two yoke of oxen drawing the wagon with Luke and Asahel mounted on Indian ponies.

At first the young steers were inclined to be fractious, resenting the yoke, but after the first day they sullenly resigned themselves to their lot and plodded on. Traveling was much faster with two yoke of oxen instead of the old jaded pair. The horses made driving the cattle much easier. Salita was able to ride in the wagon when she chose, which left her with a larger reserve of strength at the end of the day.

But the wear and tear of the journey was telling on her nerves terribly. She scolded the children like a virago. The only tenderness she felt was for the baby. She minded him with scrupulous care, and while the hard travel wore on him and he did not gain, still she gloried in the fact that he was holding his own. This was a constant marvel—too many babies sickened and died on the long trail.

The little heifer was giving nearly a quart at a milking—the grass was strong and sustaining and water could be had at most of the camping-places. Wyonoshut knew the trail like an open book. Some days he forced travel nearly to the breaking-point in order to make a stream by nightfall. Other times he loitered.

The country which from the first glimpse as they descended the Blue Mountains had seemed to be a vast open prairie resolved itself into undulating hills, stony in many places and covered with gray-green sagebrush and stunted juniper trees. The night now was an agony of cold, and the middle of the day excruciatingly hot. The dust swirled in clouds, nearly suffocating them as they plodded on with heads down.

Salita marveled at the amount of misery human beings could endure and still cling to life. The children fretted and quarreled. The baby often cried himself to sleep because she could not find time to soothe him. They *must* keep moving if they were to survive. The only object of the day was to cover

the slow-dragging miles. Space became a monster that ate into the girl's being as they plodded along, her heart like a stone in her breast, too spent to brood over sorrow or loss. Life was just a dogged placing of one foot ahead of the other, through days eternities long.

Wyonoshut kept a watchful eye on Cynthia Harkness, bringing her back to the wagon when she stole off by herself. Salita felt a fierce, unreasoning anger with her at times, but the anger melted into pity as she remembered the kindly woman with the gentle hand and the merry heart who took her into her family when she suffered bereavement. For one thing she was devoutly thankful, the baby was safe. After the first flush of her resentment at his presence his mother had ignored him altogether, never so much as mentioning him or casting a glance his way when he screamed for food or with the colic. But Salita, with an instinct that she did not try to interpret, never left him alone. There was no telling what might happen. The children formed the habit of watching, too, and of running to the wagon if their mother chanced to so much as start toward it when Salita's back was turned.

For two weeks they traveled, making ten miles, twelve miles, sometimes eighteen miles a day on a forced march to reach water, laying by twice at Salita's urging to rest the stock and to wash. Wyonoshut saw no use in washing, though he realized that

the old oxen were weakening under the strain He spent the time in camp sorting his *ictas* and once made up two of the sacks and hid them in the branches of a large juniper tree.

Salita was worried over the supplies. The flour was gone entirely; dried apples they had not had for months. The beans would last only a day or so. The bacon had long since vanished before the onslaughts of appetites made keen by open air and strenuous exercise. Wyonoshut was a good hunter. He killed a deer and numerous prairie chicken and these eked out the ration wonderfully, but still, as the girl surveyed her scanty store of food, she worried.

But finally they reached the trading-post at Willow Creek, and Salita heaved a sigh of relief. At least they would not starve. The stock of goods was low; it was nearing the end of the season. In a week or so the trader would betake himself to the settlement, there to wait for the next season's emigration.

Salita had become so accustomed to her trousers and boots that she scarcely gave them a thought. The self-consciousness had left her, and if the matter entered her mind at all she was merely aware that they afforded her greater ease of movement than the long trailing skirts, forever catching on the wagon, had done. With a start she realized that she must have a dress before she came to the country where women wore conventional garb.

Charging Mattie Lou to mind the baby, she retired to the wagon to take the coin from her belt, scrupulously laying out money from her own store for her needs and from that belonging to the Harknesses for the supplies. She would be strictly honest in her dealings even if she had thought it prudent to keep the matter of family finances to herself.

Mattie Lou was greatly disappointed. She had been looking forward to visiting the post to watch Salita buy the supplies. This was an event in her life. She stormed and wailed. Poor child, she, too, was petulant from weariness, but the promise of a treat of some sort placated her, and Salita set off alone.

There was flour, but it was forty dollars a hundred and there were nine of them to provide for. The trader was obstinate. He had hauled his supplies nearly two hundred miles from Oregon City and of course must have a profit on his goods. The need was great. After much figuring and puckering of the brows in perplexity and a return to the wagon for increased capital, Salita made her bargain with him. A flitch of bacon, rather rancid, and rice and beans she would buy. She looked longingly at dried apples, but one dollar a pound was clear out of the question. They must manage with just the bare necessities, and skimp on those, or the money would be gone before they reached the settlement.

She turned at last to look at the yardage. A dress she must have. A length of linsey-woolsey would cost twenty dollars. At first she grimly resolved to pay

the price, but a thought struck her like a sudden sharp blow. How could she make a dress on the march from daylight until dark? There was no light in the evening to work by but a flickering fire, even if she could snatch a minute from her round of absolutely necessary duties. She fingered her money in indecision, while looking around for something for the children. There was a small sack of potatoes, not more than a peck, the first digging of "Blue Mechanics" from the Willamette Valley.

Flinging defiance at fate and misfortune, she made her decision. She picked out nine potatoes, one for each member of the family. How the children would shout when they saw them. They would roast them in the ashes. Not a mouthful of fresh green food had they tasted since the long journey began. She trembled a little at her audacity, not daring to ask the price. She meant to pay for them with her own money. The price was one dollar each—nine dollars. For a reckless moment she did not care, though she knew that she would regret her foolishness afterward.

Luke showed his relief when she told him of her purchases. "Where did you get the money, Salita?" he inquired. "I have been worrying over supplies. I thought father must have taken the money belt with him. Mother did not seem to remember anything about it."

"Never mind," Salita smiled. "We used to think

that money grew on bushes in the Oregon Country."

The supper that night was a joyful affair. Wyonoshut's eyes twinkled that she had remembered him, though he made no comment.

That night she found time after the children were in bed to bathe baby; many days only a sketchy cleansing had been managed, and young babies must be kept clean if they were to thrive. She was dismayed as she counted his little ribs, but he cooed, and after a bit of coaxing smiled for the first time in his life. He would live! She had that to be thankful for. A sick baby saw no humor in life. She hugged him to her, burying her face in his soft little neck before she put him to bed.

Troublesome as that baby was, if it were not for him she felt sure she would have given up the struggle, but no one with a heart in her breast could abandon a baby to his fate. The baby had every right to live, and live he should!

But after the camp settled for the night the poor girl descended from the peaks of hope to the black valley of despair. She counted her money—$356—no amount of calculating would make it a cent more. She had spent $144, and knew that even with the venison Wyonoshut could be depended upon to provide they would have serious difficulty in eking out the supplies until they reached the settlement.

The matter of raiment troubled her terribly in the long night watches. She would be obliged to enter

the settlement in men's clothing. Would appear under false colors right from the start. Public sentiment, even in the stress of travel, was against indecorum in women. A few bold females had appeared in trousers when the wagon-train set forth, but they found themselves shunned by everyone. They were considered lewd. There were certain things that ladies simply did not do, and to dress immodestly was the worst sin in the whole catalogue of female transgressions.

In her travail of soul the girl sobbed, stuffing the pillow into her mouth to still the sound. She longed to lay her head in her mother's lap and weep her heart out. If Cynthia Harkness had kept her senses she would understand and comfort her, but, no use, her gentle friend was as far removed from her in spirit as if seas rolled between them.

Her mood changed suddenly. If an unkind fate had forced her to such straits, she would play the part. She felt of her hair, a tangled mass of ruddy copper. There was no time to take care of it. She would cut it off. What chance had she to teach school if there was ugly talk about her? And there would be. So she might as well act the part.

Imps of doubt and rage and fear took possession of her. How was the family to live after they reached the settlement? She had put that question resolutely from her when it entered the outer fringes of her mind, living in each strenuous day. Now, in the darkness, she faced it squarely, and even in her rebellion

knew that she must shoulder their burdens even though she died under the load. Joe Harkness was certainly dead. Like Luke, she had long since ceased to look back along the road with eyes strained for the sight of him and the negro man, Pompey.

She rose resolutely. She would cut her hair like a man and with sheer bravado dominate the situation. She fumbled about in the kit for a pair of scissors, but could not find them. Well, she would wait until morning. She ran caressing fingers through the waving masses. Her hair was ugly. It had always humiliated her because it was red, but still, she might regret cutting it off. Spent with her emotion, she slept at last, and when the first dim rays of light showed through the circular opening in the end of the wagon cover she felt relief that her hair was intact, thinking that perhaps her cutting it off had just been a bad dream, after all. She was a lady born and bred, and no amount of acting would disguise the fact. No matter in what cruel situation life placed her, a lady she would remain.

VIII

THE BARLOW PASS

The lordly Columbia, father of waters, wended his blue way to the sea, tearing through basaltic gorges, or smiling in the afternoon sun like a resplendent mirror set in the smooth brownish-yellow hills. But Salita scarcely glanced at the magnificent panorama. At the first of the journey she had exulted in the change and the loveliness about her, but that, she thought, was in the days of her happy, care-free girlhood; now she was a mature woman bent under heavy burdens, and her only thought was of miles—miles to be traversed, of streams to be forded, of food to be prepared. Thus did the stress of the Oregon Trail blind the eyes to its sheer aching beauty.

For another week they plodded on. Wyonoshut knew the road. He could make a ford through a river without mishap. Luke told Salita more than once, that but for him they would have been drowned, or have fallen by the wayside and have left their aching bones for the wolves to quarrel over. And yet, he was a peculiar Indian, saying so little, spending every moment while they were in camp in an endless sorting and gloating over his *ictas*. Just why he had attached himself to them neither Salita nor Luke could

make out, but every day they gave thanks for his kindly ministrations.

In vain they looked back from every rise of the road for some sign of the train they had left at Emigrant Springs, but evidently this party was not to overtake them, as they had so confidently promised. The doubling of their oxen and the horses of Wyonoshut had enabled them to make better time than they had before, but Luke was sure that their friends had taken one of the various cut-offs and so were ahead of them.

They journeyed over the rolling country, rich in bunch grass for the cattle and studded with sagebrush that sent up its pungent thanks to the sun during the hot afternoons. The contour of the land was gradually changing, the hills became mountains, small abrupt mountains each crowned with rimrock as if the gods had laboriously squared the stone with gigantic tools.

Juniper trees that had struggled through untold centuries for the meager moisture that lay far below the sandy soil somehow comforted Salita. She had the habit of gathering a twig to inhale its strong acrid odor. She felt that she was becoming like a stunted juniper tree that voiced its struggle with the elements in unpleasantness. The wells of sweetness had dried up in her. Her tongue in those trying days was sharp as the bitter tang of the crushed juniper.

Cynthia Harkness took her gently to task for her shrewishness. "You do not see me losing my temper

over trifles," she told the sullen girl with the artless candor of childhood. "Learn to take joy from each day as it comes." The woman lifted up a full throaty voice in one song she sang so constantly:

> "One bright May morning John did go,
> Down in the meadow for to mow.
> Tu rinka tu ri, tu ri la ri,
> Tu rinka tu ri, tu ri la."

The endless repetition of this inane ditty nearly drove Salita mad. She did not answer, but she told herself fiercely, as she bent over the fire, that folks who had no responsibility could manage cheerfulness most beautifully. Those who were obliged to shoulder the burdens of others sometimes developed unlovely traits of disposition for which they were unjustly censured. But what was the use? Cynthia Harkness was in no way to blame for her loss of faculties. The girl dismissed the matter briefly, losing herself in her never-ending duties about the campfire and in the wagon.

At length they reached the last bad ford of the journey. The mouth of the Deschutes. This was a treacherous stream, a river of mystery, narrow and deep as it cut its way through the solid rock. Fed by underground springs, it neither rose nor fell more than a foot or so with the seasons. Returning travelers had told fearsome tales of the perils in making the crossing.

Wyonoshut assured them in his broken English

that they would make the last ford without difficulty. He had friends here who would pilot them. Indians who knew the safe shallows of the various streams were in waiting for the emigrant trains. Guiding them across was a lucrative business.

Sure enough, there were tepees in the quaking asps that fringed the river. Wyonoshut lost no time in making arrangements with a trusted *tillicum*, a grinning buck who told them with much gesticulation that he was willing to assume all responsibility for their safe conduct.

Salita quailed as she looked out over the river which widened as it joined the Columbia. It would be necessary to drive the wagon out onto the sandbar at its mouth. Here were the treacherous quicksands and eddies. The cattle could swim easily enough, but there was always the possibility of losing the wagon, so the stories ran.

Wyonoshut paid no heed to her questionings, but drew his friend aside and began a lengthy dickering with him. The powwow lasted the better part of an hour before they came to satisfactory terms. Dickering is the greatest pleasure Indians enjoy. The price was clearly going to be high.

At last an agreement was reached, the canny Indian demanded a steer from the herd and one of Wyonoshut's ponies. There was nothing to do but agree, though Luke declared that before they reached the settlement they would have paid out all their cattle.

Fortunately, the Columbia was low—they could see the gray bottom most of the way. In some parts there would be firm dry sand that could be depended upon to hold them up. With a trembling heart Salita settled the children and Cynthia Harkness in the wagon as the Indian strode up beside the wavering oxen with a long black whip in his hand. Slowly they moved out into the stream; it was not so difficult as it had seemed from the shore. In a few minutes they gained the sand-bar and paused while the guide waded cautiously out into the water with a long pole to take his soundings. A misstep swept him off his feet. He swam back and tried again. Farther out he went this time—it seemed to the trembling girl that he would go clear to the middle of the river, but he came back at last with a grunt of approval.

Cautiously the guide started the oxen. The riverbed was level for a few yards, then one of the animals lost his footing and floundered, nearly upsetting the wagon. The Indian called something to Salita. She understood. Without a moment's hesitation she climbed from the front of the wagon onto the back of one of the oxen, speaking reassuring words to them. The water seethed over the tongue. The guide motioned for her to make the back of the lead ox. The children were screaming in terror as the water boiled around the wagon. One mighty forward plunge and they gained a firmer footing.

Again and again the oxen floundered, losing their

footing and swimming a few strokes until their feet touched solid bottom. The guide grunted directions which she could not hear, but she did not for a moment lose her head, patting the ox on the neck to guide him. At last they drew up on the opposite bank. The wagon-bed had taken water. The bedding was soaked, but they were safe over the last bad ford. "*Skookum squaw*," the Indian grunted his admiration as she unyoked the oxen on the bank.

Quickly she set about making a fire while the guide returned to the opposite bank to direct the swimming of the cattle. This would require the remainder of the day. She spread the contents of the sodden wagon to dry in the hot sun with a prayer of gratitude in her heart; at least no one was drowned, though the beds would be very uncomfortable that night. They had slept in wet beds before, and they could easily do it again. The baby was safe and dry and warm. Mattie Lou had clung to him with the courage of desperation all the way across.

Soon they would reach Ten Mile Creek and then Barlow's gate where the toll road began. Not much over a hundred miles to the settlement now, they felt relief that the greatest dangers of the long journey were over. How thankful they should be that Samuel Barlow had had the vision to find the gap in the Cascade Mountains. Before his time emigrants had been obliged to "shoot the rapids" of the Columbia above The Dalles, in frail Indian canoes, but for the

last two years they had been able to make the way clear through on dry land.

Every emigrant knew the story of the Barlow Road: Samuel Barlow had stood on the road in the Blue Mountains just where they had emerged from the timber after leaving Emigrant Springs and his keen eye had noted a depression in the Cascades where he declared wagons could pass. "God never made mountains that He did not leave gaps in for men to cross," he had declared to his doubting fellow travelers.

In the face of doubt and ridicule he made a seventy-mile trip of exploration alone in search of the pass. An ancient Indian trail led through it. He held firmly to the conviction that this winding path could be widened for wagons, and after terrible difficulty that first train crossed the mountains in the early winter of 1845.

The Legislature of the Provisional Government of Oregon had granted Samuel Barlow a charter to build a wagon road over the pass, and the next summer detailed forty men for the work. One hundred forty-five wagons and numerous droves of cattle and sheep crossed the Cascades in 1846. At last the road to Oregon was open the entire distance.

The toll over the Barlow Road was two dollars and a half a wagon but widows passed over free of charge and those unable to pay came through on their promise to make the sum good as soon as they could earn the money in the settlement.

The Harkness family plodded on the next day. Salita was worried more than she liked to admit to Luke over the supplies. Their appetites were all too good. With one hundred miles still to travel, they would be entirely out of rations before they reached the settlement if they did not push on with all possible haste.

A drizzling rain driven before an icy wind struck them as they began the ascent of the mountains. They could see the fresh fall of snow near the base of Mount Hood. It was now late October. Travel had almost ceased; not a single wagon overtook them. This filled Luke and Salita with dismay. The road over the mountains was difficult. They had hoped to find traveling companions so that they might double up with the oxen over the difficult grades and men who would assist them. Luke and Asahel were strong and willing, but they lacked experience in traversing bad grades. Wyonoshut was the only optimistic individual in the party.

All but hopeless, they plodded on day after day. Mattie Lou rode in the wagon most of the way to keep the baby warm and to tend the smaller children who were exhausted with the hard travel. The others walked, struggling along over the slippery roads sometimes ankle deep in mud and rutted down three feet where the wagon-trains had worn the loose soil of the grade to the sharp bedrock.

The cow calved. They had been awaiting this event for days. A light slushy snow fell that night and

the calf died from exposure, but the cow came through well enough. Eagerly they awaited the ninth milking when the milk would boil and be fit for use. The heifer had failed until she gave barely enough for the baby, but now she could be dried up and turned with the herd. The fresh milk would see them through. They still had a great deal for which to be thankful, Cynthia Harkness pointed out. She was cheerful and optimistic and as eager as a child to reach the journey's end.

At Mount Hood Meadows the road became almost impassable. The rain had turned this swampy ground into a veritable bog. The oxen floundered and mired in the mud time after time. Salita did the work of a man beside Wyonoshut and the two boys, unyoking the oxen and helping to pry the wagon out of the half-frozen mud with poles. Twice they were forced to unload and pack their goods out on the oxen. For three days they labored like Trojans to make a scant ten miles, but at dusk the third night they reached higher ground, and saw a camp fire in the distance. On coming closer they made out the outlines of a covered wagon with two yoke of oxen and a few cattle grazing near.

Joy filled the whole weary party—at least they could hope for companions on the last lap of the journey. A tall man with an unkept growth of sandy whiskers ran forward to meet them. He also was overjoyed.

"I've been waiting a week for help," he told them.

"My wife is too sick to travel and we are nearly out of supplies. Our situation is beginning to be desperate."

Filled with pity, Salita opened the flap at the back of the wagon and entered. The sick woman, lying on a pallet, was shivering with cold in spite of the blankets that covered her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "help has come! I was afraid we would all perish here in the mountains. My baby died when it was born over a week ago, and I can't regain my strength. Always before I was able to be up and about the third day, but here a week has gone and I can't get up. What will we ever do?" She began to cry weakly.

"We'll help you, Mrs.——"

"Wilkinson," the sick woman supplied.

"We'll see that you get through with us, Mrs. Wilkinson," Salita told her. "I'll fix something you can eat and brew you a strong cup of tea right away."

Mrs. Wilkinson's eyes glittered at the mention of tea. How she had longed for the good hot drink.

That night the Wilkinsons dined sumptuously on beans and pilot bread and molasses. They had been living for nearly a week on stringy beef, being obliged to butcher a lean cow to keep them alive until help came.

After supper they held a council, Tom Wilkinson, Wyonoshut, Salita, and the boys. They decided at length to pool their forces in the effort to make their

way to the settlement. Provisions enough for the Wilkinson family—there were five children, two half-grown girls and three boys—were to be left, and Tom Wilkinson would take his oxen and see them over the mountains. He would be with them at least a week, then he would return and wait for help from the settlement.

"Wait-um one day, me hunt-em deer," Wyonoshut said, and to this they agreed. A day would give the oxen a rest and Salita could care for the sick woman and help to put her on her feet. She felt an overwhelming pity for Mrs. Wilkinson, and somehow was reconciled to Cynthia Harkness's plight. Better blankness of mind than the complete failure of the body to adjust itself to its terrible environment, she realized.

The plan they made seemed feasible, though they all admitted that there was great risk in leaving a sick woman alone in the mountains with only two girls, the elder fourteen and the other twelve, to tend her and three small children; still, there was no other alternative. Delay would mean starvation for the whole family.

Salita was to seek out Mrs. Wilkinson's brother, Bill Marcy, in Oregon City, and to send him with fresh oxen and seventy-five dollars worth of provisions in return for safe conduct over the mountains. Wyonoshut and the boys came in at night with two deer, as they had promised. The Indian agreed a bit reluctantly to leave his one sack of *ictas*. He

had cached the other when the going became hard in the mountains. He would see them to Philip Foster's farm on the Sandy River and then return with Tom Wilkinson to help him over the pass.

With four yoke of oxen and two head of cattle and renewed courage they set forth at daylight. It seemed to Salita that all the previous misery of travel that they had endured, if rolled in one bundle, would not equal the suffering of those ten days in the mountains around Mount Hood. From her first glimpse of that majestic peak from the Blue Mountains she had longed to reach it, but the realization of her longing brought bitterness and hate for it. Snow nearly blinded them and numbed them with cold. She wrapped the baby in his blanket and placed the awkward bundle next her body that he might absorb its warmth. She kept her face turned away from the great peak, frowning in frozen severity. Mountains were a menace to human life, seeming to smile and beckon from a sunny distance and strangling the traveler in icy fingers when he came within reach.

She lost all count of days in her struggle to bring whimpering children over the frozen trail, in unloading their goods and fastening packs on the oxen and then reloading them in the wagon. A river, white with the minerals from the mountain, that its roaring waters carried in suspension, nearly took the wagon. The road was covered with slushy half-frozen snow, so that oftentimes they lost it completely.

One of the oxen broke a leg in a half-frozen huckleberry swamp and had to be shot. They scarcely paused. Stopping even for an hour meant freezing to death. Salita wondered if she, too, were losing her mind. Her only thought was for the helpless baby clasped warmly to her breast or given to Mattie Lou to hold in the wagon when the children could ride. Cynthia Harkness minded least of all. Her good nature was unfailing. Cold or hunger or fatigue never seemed to reach the citadel of her simple consciousness. The sight of her placid face angered Salita, but her monotonous song,

> "One bright May morning John did go,
> Down in the meadow for to mow.
> Tu rinka tu ri, tu ri la ri,
> Tu rinka tu ri, tu ri la."

repeated endlessly tried them all to the limit of endurance.

The drawn agony of Tom Wilkinson's face as he worked with the oxen or carried huge loads of baggage over the half-frozen slippery grades moved the girl to tears that she could not shed. Every painful step brought them *nearer* the settlement, but he must return to bring out a sick wife and his little family. The odds were against him, that, she knew, he realized. The sight of a grave on the steep hillside was too much to bear, and yet they passed many such unmarked resting-places of those who had succumbed to the trail. The last hundred miles of the road to

Oregon was a Gehenna through which only the strongest souls could pass and live.

A cougar caught the little heifer one night and made off with her before Luke could get his gun. The boys had driven the cattle over the pass, leaving Tom Wilkinson and Wyonoshut to bring the wagons through. The loss of the heifer didn't matter, nothing mattered, but the number of miles they could tell off through the aching cold of the days.

Down Laurel Hill, the last terrible grade, they made their slow way at last. This ten miles had become famous in the history of the trail. The narrow road led down a two thousand-foot descent; one thousand feet they dropped in one mile—the hardest mile in the world, Salita knew as she looked over a precipice that the emigrants claimed was two thousand feet above the roaring Zigzag River. Wyonoshut had been over the trail before. He cut trees and fastened them to the rear of the wagon to hold it back. A single misstep of the oxen and the wagon would certainly plunge off the grade into the river, but they descended in safety. Three crossings of the tumbling Zigzag they made in terror before they reached a comparatively easy grade sloping gradually to the valley. Across Big Sandy, swollen with autumn rains to Little Sandy, they made their way, then found an open road with an easier grade.

The west slope of the Cascades was warm and sunny. Wyonoshut pointed to blue berries hidden among glossy green leaves, and the children gathered

them eagerly. The rain was over. The October sun warmed the earth and filled them with a vast content as they trudged along, until they reached Philip Foster's farm at Eagle Creek, where a snug log cabin with smoke curling from its wide stone chimney spoke eloquently to them of civilization. They had crossed the plains at last! Two days, or at the most, three, if they traveled leisurely, would bring them to Oregon City.

There was good food and abundant hospitality at the Foster farm. The emigrants all felt that their troubles were over when they reached this haven.

"Soon see," Wyonoshut told Salita as she grasped his hand in parting. She meant to thank him, but could find no words. Tom Wilkinson's face worked as she bade him goodby. She knew the stark fear in his heart. But she gave him every assurance that she would find his brother-in-law the moment she reached Oregon City and send him over the pass at once with supplies.

A blissful day they waited to wash and prepare food as well as to allow the oxen to rest. Salita would almost have known happiness if it had not been for her fears for the Wilkinson family. She went about with a fervent prayer in her heart that the poor mother might come through alive, and while she prayed, doubted. The season was late. The winter snows would soon fill the Barlow Pass.

She gave thanks that she had brought the helpless family, that a strange fate had so unwittingly trusted

to her care, through in safety. Above all she was grateful that the baby was alive and fairly well. Even if he were a bit thin and worn, he would soon take on flesh when he could rest all the day in his warm bed.

All life was before her. She was strong and well and only eighteen. Thus youth recuperates after the heavy burden drops from its slender shoulders, springing up like a lithe willow sapling that has bowed to the ground before the storm.

IX

SALITA IS REBUFFED

Creak, creak, the rickety wagon groaned as the lean oxen bore it slowly into Oregon City. It seemed to Salita that that wagon with its tattered dirty cover was a sentient thing, putting forth the last of its strength to reach its destination, and that, the end accomplished, it would disintegrate before their eyes.

Wyonoshut had allowed them to keep one of his ponies for driving the cattle. Luke and Asahel started earlier than the family, so that they might give their four head of cattle time to graze by the wayside. The old ox showed signs of dropping by the trail, since his companion broke his leg he had traveled with the herd, but there was grave doubt of his recovery, even if he found good grass through the winter. The trail had worn him out. Both realized that it would be a mercy to shoot him, but could not bring themselves to it, though he slowed up the movement of the others.

A yoke of young oxen, a cow giving milk, a two-year-old heifer and two thin steers, beside a worthless old ox who only lived by reason of his past services, were the pitiful remnant of a vigorous thriving herd that Joe Harkness had set out with so confidently.

As they moved along down the foothills from Philip Foster's farm Salita was happy that they had mastered the mountain pass, but now that they were nearing civilization she admitted certain misgivings. How she hated to go into the settlement clad in men's clothing! But she grimly settled the gun in her belt and forged on with her head in the air.

What would people think? Well, let them think. What would they say? Let them say. Her conduct would prove the sort of girl she was. She had done her level best, and no right-minded person would blame her for her predicament. The family were as clean as she could make them with the scanty means at hand. They would speedily find friends among their own kind. Settlers in new communities were invariably good to one another. She told herself over and over that she had nothing to fear if she did right as Granny Silcox had told her. But apprehension still persisted in spite of her high-held chin and her firm step.

Gideon Martin, her bachelor uncle, was somewhere in the neighborhood of Oregon City. She would find him as soon as she had sent Bill Marcy on with help for the Wilkinson's. The Harkness family would somehow be provided for. Never would she leave helpless baby Joe and poor simple Cynthia Harkness to their fate in a strange new country. They would take a claim and the boys were able to work on it like grown men. With careful handling there would be money enough for winter supplies.

Many a family had come into Oregon in a worse plight. She would teach a small school after a while and look after them.

The day was mild and warm, the sky a vast blue dome, the sun warming the earth after the sharp frost of the Indian-summer night. From a hill she looked down on Oregon City, a single street in a narrow defile made by the mighty Willamette cutting through solid black rock after it fell in a mighty volume above. The town, to her, as she stood looking down, was like the glimpse the Israelites had of the promised land. Here, henceforth was her home, purchased at terrible cost of life. Her mother and father and all their worldly possessions were the blood money paid for the privilege of establishing a hearthstone here.

Cynthia Harkness ran like a child from one interesting thing to another. Late flowers bloomed here and there, rewarding her search. She had woven a chain of them, purple asters from the banks of a little run, and yellow arnica interspersed with pearly everlasting and the scarlet leaves of the vine maple. She carried in her hands a great spray of snowberries, talking to the silvery white globes as if they were sentient things. The children, too, were happy that afternoon as they first viewed Oregon City, their little faces stained with the purple juice of the sickish sweet salal berries that they had gathered along the way.

The baby began fretting as they reached the out-

skirts of the town and Salita carried him to soothe him. Her wide brown eyes looked fearlessly on the world, wondering and half fearing that it might be hostile. The straight column of her neck testified as to her strength of character. Her red hair showing through holes in the crown of her old straw hat was an indication of her temper, and the broken cowhide boots tucked in faded blue pantaloons with a flannel shirt open at the neck would certainly prove to any prim woman of that day that she was no lady.

But unless the observer had taken the trouble to scan her closely she would have passed for a slender boy who had grown too fast for his own good.

Oregon City was then a village of not more than six hundred inhabitants. There were only a hundred houses, but stores there were in plenty, and a grist mill, a sawmill, and numerous blacksmith shops.

Salita had painfully counted her money that morning, laying out four twenty-dollar gold pieces to pay her debt to Tom Wilkinson. With these in the palm of her hand she assumed an air of courage that she was far from feeling and stopped her ox team in front of the largest trading-post.

Saturday was market day for the settlers. Women and giggling girls filled the store, kept by a rotund Dutchman, Gottleib Smoot. First she would inquire for Bill Marcy and then buy supplies that the family needed.

Cynthia Harkness, in her grotesque headdress of fall flowers, her arms filled to overflowing with snow-

berries and the scarlet leaves of the vine maple, escaping Salita's vigilance, managed to lead Buddy into the emporium, with Lemuel and Sissy close in her wake.

Seldom Purdy with his wife, known jocosely in the settlement as "Aunt Fat," on account of her thinness, had come in to market their butter and eggs that day. Uncle Sel was the wit of the whole countryside. His droll remarks upon this and that and what not kept the entire community in jests. His thin beard, like the whiskers of a goat, was stained from the tobacco he was constantly spitting. His very appearance was a joke in itself.

"Wal, I vum," he said to Smoot as Salita, with her head high, entered the store. "Here's a customer fer ye. Jist got in over the pass, like ez not."

Smoot was by nature ill-humored. Moreover, his scant stock of patience with immigrants was completely exhausted. "Ya," he ejaculated. "Credit iss that vat you vant, alreatty?"

"I want no credit," Salita informed him haughtily. Turning to Uncle Sel, she asked him to direct her to Bill Marcy.

Uncle Sel eyed her keenly. "I took ye fer a overgrown boy in that thar rig," he laughed, "but I swan to Guinea ef ye ain't a gal, and I see now thet ye air a-holdin' a baby."

Curious eyes turned to Salita. She colored angrily, but returned the stares.

Aunt Fat at the mention of a baby desisted from

her calico-chewing. The butter and egg money was going into calico for a Sunday dress for her, and chewing a sample was a sure way to find out whether it would fade or was fast in color.

"How old's your baby, Missis?" she inquired, turning down the blanket to scrutinize the little face. "Where be yer husban'? Ye done right smart ter fetch yer baby down over Barlow Pass."

"Why," Salita stammered, and reddened furiously. "I am not married. This is Mrs. Harkness's baby."

"Young girls should not have babies, I've told her so again and again," Cynthia Harkness piped up.

The women and girls turned cold, hostile eyes on Salita as they drew hastily aside. Aunt Fat looked sharply at her, but said nothing, as she took the baby in her arms and crooned to him after the fashion of grandmothers.

"Here you, Wild Flower Ann," Uncle Sel said to cover the confusion, "tell us whar ye be a-goin'?" Attention turned at once to Cynthia Harkness, brave in her decorations.

Cynthia Harkness laughed joyfully. "Wild Flower Ann is a pretty name. Everyone must call me that." She beamed on the assembly. Uncle Sel touched his head significantly as they all smiled at his joke.

"Wild Flower Ann ye be fer the rest of yer days. Namin' folks air my specialty," he chuckled.

"Here gal, I'll take ye to Bill Marcy's blacksmith shop," and he led an angry, humiliated girl out of

hearing of the jibes and scornful criticism that he knew would follow. An unmarried mother was an abomination in the settlement. "Better a girl lay dead in her coffin than live to mother a child without a father," was a common saying. For all his joking, Uncle Sel was a kindly man. He blamed himself now for his thoughtlessness. The girl, as the old saying went, "was born but not buried." Aunt Fat would not suffer by befriending her; neither would he.

"Mrs. Harkness is not right in her mind," Salita told him and Aunt Fat as they left the store. "She has never recognized her baby since he was born. I have had to care for him."

"I see," Uncle Sel said slowly, but his tone did not carry conviction. Salita read doubt in the flash between him and Aunt Fat, and kindly as the old couple were, that glance was like a poisoned dart entering her heart. Too stunned to speak, she moved along behind them, then quickly squared her shoulders and strode ahead, turning in a moment to face them angrily.

"I'll see whether this community takes me for a strumpet," she declared, shaking her fist in the astonished faces of the old couple.

"Thar, thar! Aunt Fat an' me hain't suspicioned ye," Uncle Sel said soothingly.

"Never ye mind, gal," Aunt Fat seconded.

"But I will mind," Salita raged. "No one shall attack my character because I have no father and mother to defend me. I'll look out for myself from

this time on." She put her hand on the gun in her belt. "I've borne so much now that I'm hard and mean. Hard and mean I'll be from this on. This whole settlement can just watch out. I'll take nothing in the way of slights from any of them."

Uncle Sel eyed her solemnly as she stood with her hand on the gun, her eyes sullen and the dark flush of humiliation splashing her face and neck. "I got a name fer ye, too, gal," he drawled, after a moment's meditation.

"I'll need a new name," Salita told them hotly. "My own name will never be known in this country. If I must be disgraced, the stain shall not rest on my family. Our women have all been clean and virtuous."

Uncle Sel turned to Aunt Fat, who was absorbed for the moment in the baby. "Ye mind that narrer-leaved dock 'ith the reddish fringe o' bloom? Ye make sich good pies 'ith hit when ye sweeten it up like 'ith 'lasses. Long sweetenin' hit sure takes ter git the vinegar outen it, but them pies air fust class when we hain't got dried apples."

"Yes," Aunt Fat assented absently.

"The settlers call that thar dock sour gal. This gal someways reminds me o' that yarb. Her hair air the same color ez its bloom and her disposition's jist as full o' vinegar. I'll jist name her 'Sour Gal.' She'll sweeten in time, never fear."

"Sour Gal I am from this time on," Salita told him bitterly. "And bear this in mind, there will

be enough vinegar in Sour Gal's makeup to keep off the flies." With this cryptic remark they drew up in front of Bill Marcy's blacksmith shop, and with an effort Salita gathered her forces to tell Tom Wilkinson's story to his brother-in-law.

Bill Marcy dropped his hammer and turned the horse he was shoeing over to his helper while he listened to her story.

"I'll start before daylight in the morning and take at least three men with me. Here, Tip," he called to his grown son, "these folks say your Aunt Marinthy is sick in the mountains on the north side of Hood. Get two span of mules from the pasture and be sure the wagon tires are set and the outfit in good repair." He was a man of few words, and there was no time to be lost if the Wilkinson family were to come over the Barlow Pass alive.

Salita told him of her bargain and gave him the four twenty-dollar gold pieces. She had intended to take back five dollars in change, but relented and gave it all to him. The need of the Wilkinson family was, after all, greater than hers. She owed Tom Wilkinson a debt of gratitude that she never could pay. Her money was running low, but they would manage somehow.

Bill Marcy wasted no time. He hurried off with the money to lay in the necessary supplies, calling back over his shoulder to Salita as he departed: "You go on up to my house and spend the night. My wife'll be glad to make you comfortable."

But Salita was in no mood for meeting people. "We will camp here until Monday," she told Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat.

"Ye got money fer suplies?" Uncle Sel asked anxiously.

"Yes," Salita told him abruptly, resenting his curiosity.

"Suppose you come on out home 'ith us," Aunt Fat invited kindly. "I'll be looking after the baby for ye until ye get located."

"We'll camp here," Salita said ungraciously.

"I aim ter be a friend ter ye," Uncle Sel told her. "I believe yer story, somehow, though I'll admit thet appearances air against ye. I don't often make a mistake in jedgment. You jest take the conviction home ter ye thet I'm on yer side. Don't git too uppity. Ye'll like ez not need friends afore yer through. I allus say the time to befriend a dog air when the dog is down. Ye'll have plenty ter cheer ye when things air a-goin' stronglike. Bear that in mind, Sour Gal."

Salita thanked him stiffly and inquired if there were another trading-post in town. She must lay in food. This time by sheer force of will she compelled Cynthia Harkness, who had just come up, to remain with the wagon, and detailed Mattie Lou to mind the baby until she returned.

"I live out Hardscrabble way, nigh onto three miles south. Monday mornin' bright and airly ye

make yer way ter our house, an' I'll help ye find a location, dumbed ef I wun't," Uncle Sel promised.

"Thank you, Mr.—" Salita thawed a little at his kindliness.

"I'm Uncle Sel to all and sundry in these parts," he told her. "I wish't ye'd come on with Aunty Fat an' me this evenin'," he ruminated, more to himself than to her, "but thar's no forcin' a red-headed gal into goin' ag'in' her will. Good luck ter ye."

The old couple ambled back to Smoot's store to see how the women had taken the matter, and, besides, Aunt Fat had not yet selected her new calico dress.

X

OREGON CITY FOLKS

In every community there are families who hold themselves above the ordinary garden run of folks. There is no determining the real cause of this superior feeling, but it exists, nevertheless. Human nature ran true to form in the Oregon country. Castlines here were rather rigidly drawn, though, owing to the sparseness of the population, everyone mingled with his neighbors on friendly terms.

The aristocracy of Oregon was made up of those connected with the missionary activities and the farsighted traders who brought stocks of goods "around the Horn." Many of these latter had arrived a few years before overland emigration began, and so were securely intrenched and waxing rich from the advantages they had secured.

These first families—"the upper crust"—the immigrants called them—were from the New England States. They looked with open scorn upon the indigent immigrants from the Middle West, who lacked the culture that was to be derived from the superior educational advantages of the East.

The Barfields were among this exalted group. Judge Barfield—he had been a county judge in New York State—had arrived in Oregon in 1842 with his

wife and nineteen-year-old son. He came to attend to certain legal matters connected with the American Board of Missions and, finding the country to his liking, had established a permanent home in the outskirts of Oregon City.

His son, John Barfield, was considered a prodigy. He had been admitted to the bar just before leaving the States, and practiced law with his father in Oregon City, though clients were few and far between. The two really spent most of their time in developing their 640-acre Donation Land Claim. Having capital to make a start, they had built a comfortable white frame house in the day when most of the settlers were forced to rest content with log cabins.

The frontier women stood in awe of Mrs. Barfield. It was known that she sent East for her clothing. She was fastidious in the matter of dress, setting the mode in the community, as well as being its acknowledged social leader.

Judge Barfield and Mrs. Barfield were just alighting with the ceremony that their station in life demanded in front of Smoot's store as Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat returned from the blacksmith shop. John Barfield was detained a moment in hitching the horses that drew the new light spring wagon. Every girl in the country from fourteen up had her eye on the well-set-up young man, a fact of which his doting mother was fully aware, not that it gave her a moment's anxiety. She felt fully capable of han-

dling her son to his own advantage. Two or three young women in ruffled calico dresses, with sunbonnets to match, posed and tittered as young Barfield entered in time to hear the discussion over the immigrant family who had just that moment arrived.

Aunt Fat turned her attention at once to the selection of her calico dress, though she had an ear to the comment that went on among the women and girls. Uncle Sel, too, was frankly interested in gaining the opinion of the shoppers. He was, in spite of his way of dealing with life's realities in jocose fashion, a kindly old man. Much as he loved to imbibe the gossip of the settlement, no one could recall his ever passing on a bit of scandal. He listened to the doings of human beings, good and otherwise, merely as a matter of amusement, chuckling to himself over a rare bit of wickedness or weighing a good deed to determine whether it were really noble or just the pose of some self-righteous individual with an ulterior motive.

Smoot was free in his remarks. "Dose immigrants are shusht cattles from Missoury yet," he declared scornfully. "Coming the plains across to live from us alreatty. Dey keep us frients mit poverty. Noddings dey haf. Dere bills dey pay not. Me, I lose my goots to dem."

"Mighty leetle goods you ever lost on account of a settler not paying his bills, an' ye know it," Uncle Sel remarked with a guffaw in which the other men joined.

Gottleib Smoot with his drastic methods of collecting the last cent from struggling homesteaders was a byword in the whole country.

"Vot for dey come, den? Must dey liff off me?" Smoot wanted to know.

"The settler must have credit until he harvests his first crop," Judge Barfield told the trader with dignity. "You have prospered here in spite of your complaining. We came on the same ship and you had only a small pack of goods that you carried on your back."

"Ya." Smoot's fat face was florid with his choler. "Me, I came de Horn around, not de plains across."

"Yes, and ye look down on us that walked the hull way over, driving our cattle so thet we could buy yer goods of ye at ruinous prices," a tall man lounging over the counter put in.

There was a murmur of assent to this, though nobody ventured further comment. The settlers felt bitterness toward Smoot for his manner of driving a hard bargain with them and his harshness in collecting, but they continued to exchange their farm produce with him because their womenfolks liked his selection of calico and dress materials, and he was not so particular about the quality of the butter or the freshness of the eggs as some of the other dealers were.

The feminine contingent had gathered in a little knot and were discussing the new arrivals in loud whispers. "A girl dressed in men's clothes, with boots

and all, and a gun at her belt, just came in here," a sharp-faced woman told Mrs. Barfield in a tone that carried in spite of her effort to impart a confidence.

"Yes, she had a three-months-old baby in her arms with red hair just like hers. She denied she was the mother of it, but the crazy woman with her said she was. Trust a crazy woman to tell the truth. The girl tried to hush her up, but she couldn't. A bad lot, that outfit. I didn't like the look of them." This from another woman with an air of conscious virtue.

Mrs. Barfield drew her straight brows together and pursed her thin lips, but said nothing. She was not in the habit of voicing opinions in the presence of groups of women.

"I heer ye, Nettie Harper," Uncle Sel cut in. "I war in here a-waitin' a power o' a spell while Aunt Fat chawed her calicer. The gal has red hair, and war powerful mad at the reception she got. I reckon some o' ye'll hear from her later on ef ye air minded ter mix much in her affairs."

"She has no man with her. This country will fill up with worthless trash if something isn't done about it. We want no loose women here in the settlement. Bad enough the degenerate men who come in, making 'blue ruin' and giving it to the boys."

"There ye go, Nettie Harper, climbin' onter the jedgment seat afore ye git all the facts in the case," Uncle Sel remonstrated. "Aunt Fat an' me air inclined ter believe her story. She says thet thet Wild

Flower Ann air the baby's mother, but she went daffy when het war born an' wun't own hit. Jest like my ole ewe she air, whut didn't like the look er her lamb this spring. Strange things happen on the trail. I'm minded ter believe 'most anything in reason."

"I use some sense," the woman snapped. "I can recognize a strumpet the minute I set eyes on her. Coming in dressed in men's clothes's enough to condemn her before she spoke. I mean to take the matter up with the authorities. We'll have no such example set before our young girls."

"Is the family destitute?" Mrs. Barfield, asked a bit anxiously. She was president of the Good Intent Society of the Methodist Church and so made it her business to look closely into the circumstances of needy immigrants.

"I reckon not egzactly," Uncle Sel snorted. He did not like Mrs. Barfield and was at no pains to conceal the fact. "I seed her pay out four gold pieces to Bill Marcy ter lay in supplies ter go after his sister an' her family. Eighty dollars in cash money don't look like destitution ter me. None o' us who air so toplofty jest now had eighty dollars when we landed here barefooted and purty nigh nekked. Ef she hez more money—an' I hope she hez—ye had best not go offerin' her charity. Git her dander up, an' don't blame hit onter me ef she makes ye some trouble."

With dignity Mrs. Barfield turned a shoulder to Uncle Sel. She didn't like him, either.

"What's her name?" Nettie Harper was inquisitive.

"She refused to say," Uncle Sel told her. "I called her Sour Gal after the narrer-leaved dock we use fer pies, an' she said thet war ez good ez anything. She didn't 'low ter bring disgrace on her honest name.

"A poor girl in trouble in the States, and running clear out to Oregon to escape the disgrace," another woman spoke up quickly.

"Then fer why did she admit right onter the start thet she had no husband?" Uncle Sel wanted to know. No one answered him.

"What did the crazy woman say her name was?" asked Nettie Harper, determined to find out all the details. Uncle Sel's displeasure made them all ill at ease, but Mrs. Harper clung desperately to her point. "Perhaps she said she had no husband and that the baby was the other woman's just to make things appear natural. A girl like that would certainly have her story all cut and dried before she told it."

No one remembered the name of the crazy woman, though they were almost certain she had spoken it. Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat's displeasure made them all ill at ease.

"Wild Flower Ann, I called her in fun," Uncle Sel said. "Thet handle will do ez well as her rightful name fer the present. She was plum pleased 'ith hit, and we'll jist call the red-head Sour Gal an' be done

'ith it. For my part, I aim ter champeen thet gal. Ef she air guilty, 'tain't nothin' Aunt Fat an' me'll catch."

"If she's deserving, she'll have every assistance from us," Mrs. Barfield announced. "If not, she will be induced to leave the country."

Uncle Sel was angry. His beard moved up and down like a billy goat just before he goes into action. He spat vindictively in the direction of the open door.

"Take my advice an' leave thet gal alone. I'd ez soon fight a passel o' wildcats ez a red-headed woman 'ith her gorge up. Ef she wants yer help she'll likely ask fer hit."

"She's prettier'n tunket, ef she does wear men's clothes," a hulking young man drawled to his companions.

"Ye leave be, Nick Ridgely, afore she drills ye ful o' holes," Uncle Sel shook his fist under the young man's nose. "I reckon she'd be right handy 'ith thet shootin'-iron in her belt. From her talk, I take her to be from somewheres in the South, an' gals down thar cuts their teeth on the barrel o' a gun."

But Aunt Fat had made up her mind about the length of calico, choosing a dark-brown pattern with a yellow sprig. With hands like a bird's claws she indicated the number of yards to Smoot, and, glad to divert the attention of his customers to his stock of goods, he busied himself cutting it off the bolt and wrapping it securely.

"We must be on our way," Uncle Sel cautioned his little sparrow of a wife. "The road out Hard-scrabble way hain't any too good, an' hit's dark, plumb dark by seven o'clock."

He led the way to the door, pausing to deliver a parting shot over Aunt Fat's shoulder. "I reckon ye'll all have urgent business out near whar thet red-headed gal air camped. The hull country'll be abuzz with scandal fer a few days. But don't allow I didn't warn ye ef she worsts ye when ye interfere in her affairs."

John Barfield laughed and nodded knowingly at Uncle Sel. "The girl'll have a square deal, if I have to look after her myself," he promised, then colored painfully as his mother frowned.

"Seldom Purdy, ye talk altogether too much," Aunt Fat chided severely when they were fairly on the road home. "The less said the soonest mended. When I go to the store fer a calicer dress I choose the dress and come home, but you go around lookin' fer trouble. 'Tain't your fight, though I think that poor girl is innocent and I hope she comes out to our house Monday morning. She half promised she would. Somehow she puts me in mind o' our little girl thet died. I could feed that poor li'l' red-headed baby up in a month so ye wouldn't know him."

"Ye'll likely have the chanct," Uncle Sel prophesied. "I hope them wimmin let her alone. They'll be public charges all right lessen Sour Gal hez a head ter manage, though I did notice thet they had a

milch cow and some steers. I hope she hez money, too; thet'll help her ter recover her good name quicker'n anything else. Ef she'd done wrong why cain't she live hit down?" Uncle Sel wanted to know of Aunt Fat, but she only shook a knowing head.

"I calculate Miz Barfield'll wish she had let John go ter the gold-fields in Californy afore she air done with hit," Uncle Sel ruminated, more to himself than to his wife. "Did ye notice how he pricked up his ears an' took a interest in things when that big lummox, Nick Ridgely, said the red-head war a right pretty gal?"

"How you talk, Seldom Purdy!" Aunt Fat chided. "John hain't even seed the gal yet. I believe to the land you'd rejoice to see John Barfield choose a wife that warn't to his ma's liking."

Uncle Sel chuckled and resumed his meditative chewing of a straw from the wagon-bed. "Stranger things hez happened. When a womern gits the idee fixed in her head that no gal on earth air good enough fer her son—wal, I hain't said nothing I'll take back."

XI

MRS. BARFIELD TAKES A HAND

Salita was furiously angry; the treatment she had been accorded in Smoot's store, that subtle drawing together of women's skirts and the suspicious attitude had stirred her to rebellious rage. Before emigrating she would have been crushed under the unjust accusation, but not now. Life had dealt too sternly with her in the last few months. It seemed to her that all the cruel happenings of crossing the plains had just been sent by fate to strengthen her moral fiber to withstand this last terrible blow.

Her first impulse was to creep away like a hurt animal to nurse her wounds, that is, after her rage had subsided enough so that her thought was at all coherent; but the baby needed attention, and caring for his wants was second nature to her.

She climbed into the wagon to wait for Luke and Asahel to bring the cattle up. They would drive to the outskirts of the town as far out of range of curious eyes as possible, and then decide just what to do. One thing she knew—even a few miles of travel would be impossible with the exhausted oxen. Then, too, winter was close at hand and they must get the family under shelter. No matter what anyone said or did, the children must be cared for.

The girl brooded sullenly, squatting cross-legged on the floor of the wagon, as she swayed back and forth to put the fretting baby to sleep. She thought at first that, now that she had seen the Harkness family safely to the settlement, her responsibility was over. In a country with an organized government there were means provided for caring for indigents, and indigent they would be very shortly if she deserted them. She wondered if there was a poor-house as there was in each county in the States, or just how orphans and insane women were cared for in Oregon.

But that was when she was fairly beside herself with anger. As she sobered, she knew that nothing but downright force could separate her from the children, though she wondered if it would not be well to ask the authorities in Oregon City for medical aid for Cynthia Harkness. The name Uncle Seldom had given the poor woman, jokingly, stung Salita. "Wild Flower Ann!" How cruel, and yet the poor simple woman had been delighted with it.

Luke and Asahel finished caring for the cattle just as the baby dozed off, and Salita descended with a finger on her lip to quiet the children. Catching sight of Cynthia Harkness, her anger burst out anew.

"A nice charge you laid against me," she raged. But the bolt did not penetrate. Cynthia Harkness simply looked at her in wide-eyed childlike wonder. She scarcely remembered from one moment to the

next. Her mental condition was steadily growing worse, though she had occasional lucid intervals.

"I'm Wild Flower Ann," she exulted, her face beaming her joy. "Every one must call me by that pretty name. I have no other now."

"No," Salita said bitterly, "you have no other."

She, too, had been given a name that suited her—Sour Gal—just right in its suggestion of acidity. She meant to wear it. If she had been stigmatized by a false accusation, she was at least spared allowing the blemish to rest on her people. Her family name should not be tarnished. Never would she divulge it, nor give the least clue as to the part of the country whence she came. They would keep their affairs strictly to themselves and ask no odds of anyone.

Luke, too, had just cause for anger. "A man called you a nasty name," he told Salita in a voice a little above a whisper. "I'll use a gun if I have to. I saw them laughing at my mother, and she's only to be pitied, not held up to ridicule." Luke's soul, the sensitive soul of an adolescent boy, was wounded. He would carry the scars into his manhood.

Salita drew him aside to council with him. Luke had an old head on young shoulders even if he were inclined to headlong impetuosity at times. At first he was for pressing on to some more remote settlement, but Salita reasoned that they would likely meet the same difficulties elsewhere. Better, she was sure to locate near Oregon City as quickly as pos-

sible before their money was exhausted. They would be sadly put to it, as things stood, to keep food in their mouths until they could raise a crop. Shelter they must have at once. They would try to locate a claim and raise some sort of a cabin on it as soon as possible.

Luke was of a mind with her that they would not tell their names, nor give the settlers the least inkling of their relationship. Let them guess. The least said the better. She told him, with a flush staining her face, that the matter of baby Joe's birth was not to be discussed. She had been accused of being his mother. She had made an effort to explain and the women had drawn away in doubt. Pride forbade her ever to attempt another explanation. There was no hope that her name would be cleared, though Granny Silcox, while she could prove nothing, knew very well that Cynthia Harkness was his mother, and would do all in her power to remove a stain from the name of an innocent young girl. But there was doubt in their minds about the fate of the party they had left at Emigrant Springs in the Blue Mountains. Surely some of them would make their way to Oregon City in safety. They would keep a sharp lookout for them, but distances were great and once they located they would seldom come to town. They must face their difficulty alone.

Salita clung to the forlorn hope that Cynthia Harkness would one day come to her senses and recognize her baby. But this was a forlorn hope,

indeed. Her condition had, if anything, grown worse under the strain of travel and hardship. But Granny Silcox *must* know, and she had told her that women who lost their minds following childbirth almost always recovered and regained their sanity in time. Well, she could only hope, and she must hope hard now not only for the poor mother's sake, but for the sake of her own good name. She had long since abandoned Joe Harkness to his fate. If he were alive he would have overtaken his family before this.

Just where would they go on Monday morning? Impatiently she sent the curious children back to the wagon while she talked the matter over with Luke. Asahel resented being kept out of the council, but Luke said he was too much given to talk. Salita told him of the money she had in her belt and his face brightened with his relief. She had given Bill Marcy eighty dollars. She had exactly $276 left to locate them and provide for their needs through the winter. They must pinch every penny. Bitterly she resented having spent that nine dollars for potatoes; the money could have been used to such good advantage now.

The two agreed that they would hold the money in common. "I'll earn enough to pay you back for all of this some day," Luke told her. "Not many girls would have had the grit to do what you have done. I'll be a man before long and I'll take care of you and see that you do not have to work like a slave the rest of your life."

Luke stood in thought a moment, then brightened. "I heard some news in the street," he said. "They have discovered gold in California. A man told me that every able-bodied man in the settlement who could get away has gone to the gold-fields. He said there were good claims for sale cheap. Perhaps we can find one, or at least get a place to run on shares if we haven't money enough to pay for it. A cabin will seem mighty good and I don't know how to build one."

"Perhaps we can find something," Salita said hopefully. "That old man who named us so glibly said he knew of a place out his way and would help us locate, but I suppose he meant we could take up land."

"No," Luke said. "They told me all the good land around here was preëmpted. Probably he has a claim for sale. Let's go out and see."

Salita agreed rather reluctantly. While she knew that Uncle Sel and his wife meant to be friendly, she resented the fact that in their hearts they had doubted her story. Still, they were better than the rest, she told Luke, and they must locate at once, so had better go where the neighbors were not utterly hostile to them.

Their plans were laid quickly. Salita went to buy the absolute necessities, wondering, as she went, if she could spare the money for a dress length, and deciding against it. She would have no time for sewing for a few weeks; better wait until they were

settled. If need be, she could send Luke for some linsey-woolsey so that she would not be obliged to come into the town again in men's clothing.

True to Uncle Seldom's prophecy, they had callers early Sunday morning. Nettie Harper and her husband came by on their way to church—a full hour early. Nettie questioned Mattie Lou as to where they were going to locate, but Mattie Lou had had her instructions—*she didn't know*. Salita was in the wagon and made no move to come out. They lingered for a moment, trying to make talk with the noncommittal children, then reluctantly wended their way churchward, talking the family over before they were barely out of hearing.

Salita waited until they were well away, then went about her morning duties. She had just bathed the baby and was feeding him with cup and spoon when the Barfields drove up. It was too late for retreat; they had caught sight of her before she noticed them. There was nothing to do but stand her ground. She went on nonchalantly putting spoonful after spoonful of milk to the little mouth, giving him time to take it slowly as Judge Barfield climbed over the wheel of the shiny wagon and assisted his wife to alight from the back seat. John Barfield remained in the front seat.

Picking her skirts up daintily lest the mud stain them, Mrs. Barfield made her way up to the camp fire where Salita sat with the baby on her knees. Her black taffeta dress rustled like autumn leaves in a

faint September wind. A rich Paisley shawl was draped properly over her slight shoulders. Her well-kept hands were incased in mits of black silk that contrasted nicely with her long delicate fingers. Her poke bonnet with three blue cherries and a spray of green leaves framed a delicately molded, aristocratic face. The cameo brooch that fastened the filmy lace at her throat spoke eloquently to Salita of her mother, who always wore lace at neck and wrist and fastened her collar with just such a cameo. A wave of poignant anguish swept over the girl at the memory of her loss, rendering her speechless for the moment.

Judge Barfield followed his wife, and John Barfield sat a moment in hesitation, then alighted and busied himself with tying the team to the wheel of their wagon.

The visitors waited for Salita to speak, but she could not, so she dipped the spoon in the cup and gave it to the baby before she looked up.

Judge Barfield cleared his throat to speak, then looked appealingly in his wife's direction.

"Good morning, my good girl," Mrs. Barfield said graciously.

"Good morning," Salita returned with chilling politeness.

"You are needing assistance, I see," Mrs. Barfield ventured, not quite sure of herself. She leveled a disapproving glance at her son as she noticed that he

was speaking to Sissy, who was, as usual, smeared the molasses.

"John, your best clothes," she cautioned. John and his father were attired in black broadcloth. The camp of filthy immigrants was no place for gentlemen, Mrs. Barfield's look conveyed plainly to Salita.

"Come here to me, Sissy, and bring Lemuel and Buddy," Salita commanded. "Mattie Lou, go and wash the children." Mattie Lou anxiously did as she was bid and still Salita made no conversational opening. She noticed from the corner of her eye that John Barfield had not drawn back from the sticky children and that he colored at his mother's reproof.

"You are in need, aren't you?" Mrs. Barfield questioned, not knowing just how to proceed. "The Good Intent Society of the church will give you assistance."

Salita's face flamed to the roots of her red hair. She placed the cup of milk on the ground beside her and rose with the baby on her arm before she faced her would-be benefactor.

"We have not asked for charity," Salita told Mrs. Barfield in a voice charged with her indignation.

"We met the woman who called herself 'Wild Flower Ann' down the road. She must be taken in charge at once. The children will be provided for and suitable homes found for them.

"May I inquire just your exact relationship to

this family? You appear too old for a daughter. Your story, no doubt, is a sad one. So many tragedies were enacted on the plains. We are all so sorry. We provide for the needy here in every way we can." Mrs. Barfield hurried on as much as she would permit herself lest she should fail before the defiant stare of the girl in men's clothes before her.

For a long moment Salita stood looking her inquisitor straight in the eye. Mrs. Barfield, accustomed all her life to deference, coughed and glanced away.

"You may inquire," Salita told her at last in a low voice, deadly in its intensity. "Our story is a *very* sad one. We have suffered tragedy and great loss, but I fail to see how that justifies you in insulting us."

"My poor, misguided child, I had no intention of offending you," Mrs. Barfield remonstrated.

"We have suffered loss and misfortune," Salita went on, deathly white, "but we resent your intrusion. We'll mind our own business, and thank you to mind yours. I'm of age, and this is a free country; so long as we are law-abiding there is no reason for interference."

Mrs. Barfield's righteous indignation overwhelmed her. She would never have named her emotion in any other way. Self-righteousness was the tower from which she looked upon an erring world.

"You are not a fit person to have charge of a family," she said in a steely voice, which rose and

broke on the high note in spite of her effort to control it.

"Mother, don't judge too quickly," Judge Barfield spoke for the first time. "The case must be investigated."

John Barfield stood by in helpless misery.

"You have a baby with no father," Mrs. Barfield resumed, paying no attention to her husband and son. "We will have no such women in our decent, sober community. You came into town dressed in men's clothing, against all common decency."

The injustice of accusing her of appearing in men's clothes because she did so by preference stung Salita into defensive speech in spite of her decision to give no information. "I have no other clothing," she faltered, her voice breaking for the first time.

"The Good Intent Society meets on Wednesday. We will attend to that at once." Mrs. Barfield felt that now she was making some progress with an insolent, headstrong girl.

"You will not," Salita flared, taking the good woman entirely by surprise. "I'm old enough to manage my own affairs and I'll bid you good morning."

There was nothing for the injured Barfields to do but terminate their visit. Salita's back was turned. She gave them no further notice.

"Best see that they move on to the Yamhill country. If the season was not so far advanced we would

send them down into the Rogue River district," Judge Barfield told his wife and son.

"But, father ——" John Barfield began. His mother raised a peremptory hand to silence him, but he continued in the face of her defiance, a thing he had never before done in all his life:

"You can't blame the poor girl if she has no clothes. You've sentenced her before you've tried her, mother." He was a lawyer and knew justice when he saw it, but Mrs. Barfield moved in insulted majesty to the wagon, drawing her black taffeta skirt close about her lest the mussy children soil its immaculate folds. She handed her husband her Bible and hymn-book, while her son silently helped her to her place on the back seat of the wagon.

Salita's fury broke loose as soon as they were out of earshot.

"Give me a dress, will they?" she told the equally angry Luke. "I was intending to buy a dress, but I'll wear these britches until they won't hold together, and let any Good Intent Society try to stop me. I have an illegitimate baby, have I? I'm not a fit person to take care of a family of children? I'll show those meddling old women a thing or two before I finish. Nothing could induce me to leave this neck of the woods. Here we stay."

"You bet we do," Luke agreed. "And mother stays with us, and the children. I'll stand anyone off with a gun if they try to take them away from us."

There was no need for all that white fury, but

Luke and Salita were young and inexperienced and inclined to judge things at their face value. People in the Oregon country were kindly. Human nature is human nature the world over, but they had nothing but bitterness and resentment in their hearts because they were young, inexperienced hearts.

"That young man was kind enough," Asahel put in when the ravings of Luke and Salita had abated somewhat. "He put his hand on Sissy's head when his mother and father wasn't looking."

"Young man? What young man? I didn't notice him," Salita said absently.

XII

UNCLE SEL'S LITTLE TRICK

"Seldom Purdy, what ails ye this mornin'? Be ye daffy? Here ye be a-settin' at the breakfast table a laughin' ter yerself," Aunt Fat scolded, as she poured him a second cup of parched-pea coffee and replenished his plate with salt pork from a sizzling spider drawn out of harm's way on the ashes in front of the fireplace.

"Whut've I done now?" Uncle Sel complained plaintively. "Cain't a pore man feel good-humored-like 'ithout callin' down wrath on hisself?"

"Ye're a-hatchin' mischief, that's whut ye be. I've seed ye afore, a-chucklin' over nothin', and no good ever came o' it," Aunt Fat declared, reaching over the table to snuff the guttering tallow candle before she resumed her breakfast. It was but little after five o'clock. The rising hour summer and winter in the Purdy household was four. Uncle Sel had brought in the foaming pail of milk—they owned two good cows—and after putting his stock in the pasture had cleaned out the stable before breaking his fast.

Fair weather or foul, in sickness or in health, Monday was washday with Aunt Fat. Already a huge brass kettle full of water was hanging from the

crane in the fire place. Monday morning was no time for levity. She wanted Uncle Sel to finish breakfast at once and get out from under her feet.

Like a sparrow she pecked at a morsel of food on her plate, took a sip of coffee, did not find it to her liking, then arose and bustled about her preparations for the morning's work. She dipped a bucket of soft soap from a barrel in a near-by smokehouse and rolled her pounding-barrel from under the eaves of the cabin, and still Uncle Seldom sat hunched over his plate, from time to time emitting a chuckle between intervals of hoisting huge mouthfuls of salt pork and wheat hominy to his mouth.

"Be ye aimin' ter dig the balance o' the 'taters this mornin'?" Aunt Fat inquired as a hint that his room would please her better than his company.

"No; I 'low ter let 'em rest a spell," Uncle Seldom replied. "I got other bisness ter attend ter today. Like ez not Sour Gal'll be along here come daylight er soon after."

"She mout an' then ag'in she moutn't," Aunt Fat told him with asperity, "but them 'taters need diggin'."

"Ye leave be. I'll dig 'em afore hit rains." Uncle Sel settled himself placidly by the fireside with a clay pipe, an unheard-of thing for him to do on washday. Generally he made all haste to get out of the cabin and out of earshot of Aunt Fat's sharp tongue when she was occupied with the family laundry.

"Seein' ye have so much idle time on yer hands, ye might git the water from the branch fer me. Like's not they'll stay ter dinner. Ye mout look down the road ez ye fetch up the water. Ef ye see 'em, wring the necks o' about three o' them fat ole hens; eatin' their heads off they be, an' nairy a aig they'll lay ontil plumb spring." Aunt Fat bustled about her work as Uncle Sel, grumbling to himself, repaired to the branch for water.

By ten o'clock sundry red-flannel undergarments, backed modestly by unbleached muslin bravely edged with knit lace, flapped wildly in the brisk fall wind. The floor, of smooth boards, was scrubbed to snowy whiteness. The bed in the corner of the cabin was smoothly made up, its patchwork quilt and fat pillows covered with immaculate pink calico slips, giving a homey air to the cabin. Chickens stewing in the iron pot sent up an enticing aroma. Aunt Fat was expecting the immigrants just as Uncle Sel was, but she would not admit the fact.

"Like ez not they'll go out Abernethy Creek er off Kansas City way, an' you'n' me'll be plumb sick er b'iled chicken afore the pot's empty," she grumbled to Uncle Sel. He had killed the hens at once, without waiting as she had told him. But she was anxiously scanning the road when Uncle Sel was not looking. Though she would never have confessed it to her exasperating spouse, she hoped that the unfortunate family would come their way.

Salita's wrath had cooled somewhat by morning.

She urged the shivering children into their clothing long before daylight. They would cast the dust of Oregon City from their shoes before the denizens of the town were about. The road led straight south after they climbed the steep hill. Luke and Asahel drove the cattle slowly through the sleeping village.

Salita paused with a sharp intake of breath at the scintillating beauty of Willamette Falls, touched with shafts of rosy light as the sun rose. The Oregon country came up to her expectations, now that she had time to look about her. How she longed for her father and mother. If only they could have been spared to her, life would have been good indeed. But she shook off the brooding mood and trudged on resolutely, carrying the baby. Life always held some joy mixed with the sorrow. Perhaps by the time she was on old woman she would learn gratitude for the scant blessings that came her way, but not now. Pain and shame were her only portion. She had looked forward so eagerly to finding her uncle, Gideon Martin, but in the light of recent developments she could only devoutly hope that he would never learn of her presence in Oregon. Disgrace was a thing to be borne alone. She would not even make inquiries for him.

Once out of the town they did not hurry. It was good to loiter a bit without the guilty feeling that they might bring disaster on them by delay. The road was rough with the ruts that constant travel over it had made, and muddy in the low places after

the rains of the earlier part of the fall season. In an hour they came to a white frame set back among a natural grove of maple trees—this could not be the Purdy place. Uncle Sel had told her he lived three miles from the town. Some prosperous settler of an earlier immigration had made the utmost out of the naturally rich land. Virginia worm fences inclosed pasture land where fat cattle grazed contentedly. A young orchard flourished on a sunny southern slope.

Salita took heart as she pointed it out to Luke. "We'll have a good farm, too," she encouraged him.

"I can hardly wait to locate," he answered with youthful enthusiasm.

They jogged along for another mile, and then came to another farm—this one not quite so prosperous—that is, the buildings were only log cabins, the orchard of two-year-old trees throve, though, and there was a field evidently planted to potatoes, though it was choked with weeds.

"No one lives there," Mattie Lou told them breathlessly, returning just then from a reconnoitering expedition.

Luke looked at Salita. She caught his thought. Perhaps this was a farm that had been abandoned for the gold-fields. They might be able to secure it, or at least get permission to pass the winter there, and so have leisure to make a selection.

They left the oxen and cattle in charge of Asahel and hurried off to make sure. Yes, the place was

empty. The cabin was small—only ten by twelve—the glass in the single window had been broken. The door stood askew on its wooden hinges, but the shake roof was intact. Evidently the place had not been long abandoned.

From one point of interest to another they fairly ran. Mattie Lou's face glowed. She had been the discoverer. A garden plot of nearly an acre was inclosed with a fence of shakes, pointed like pickets at the top and nearly six feet high.

"To keep the deer from eating up the garden," Luke ventured, and Salita nodded and smiled.

How the children basked in Salita's smile, crowding about her, seeking to warm themselves as at a fire. Salita had not smiled for weeks.

Reluctantly they resumed their journey. The Purdys must live somewhere near. They would know about this claim; but Salita saddened again; she had but little hope that they could secure anything as good as this so near the town. The most that she could expect was that they might arrange to live there for a few weeks. Luke, sensing her thought, sobered, too, and his shoulders sagged a bit as he rounded up the cattle that careless Asahel had allowed to scatter while he followed them at a distance.

Another mile and another farm. This must be where Uncle Seldom and Aunt Fat lived. Smoke curled from the chimney. There was someone at home. They turned in at the pasture bars. The

cabin was below a field where wheat had stood; now it was brown stubble, with cattle grazing in it. They came on past a garden patch where pumpkins and squashes lay smiling up at the sun. There were fat rutabagas and beets bursting from well-cultivated soil, with the green plumes of carrots showing straight trim rows farther on.

A dog barked as they neared, and, sure enough, Uncle Sel arose from a rawhide-bottomed chair where he had been sunning himself most of the morning. Aunt Fat came to the door in the clean white apron that she always donned when she expected company. Appetizing odors floated from the cabin. They had spent more time at the abandoned farm than they had intended; it must be coming toward noon.

"Here ye be," Uncle Sel greeted them warmly, and Aunt Fat rushed up to take the baby from Salita's weary arms.

"Dinner's nigh onto ready," Aunt Fat said. "Jist wait ontil I count ye younguns' noses ter see how many dumplin's ter drop inter the pot. I reckon ter feed ye hearty."

"Thank you, we will not take dinner with you," Salita told her stiffly, but regretted the speech as she noted the glistening eyes of the hungry children and the immediate gloom that spread over their countenances.

"Land sakes, of course ye be!" Aunt Fat decided. To refuse a meal was an insult to her. She

was far and away the best cook in the Oregon country. But now she ignored the slight, feeling sorry for the poor girl and forgiving her for her stiff-necked rebellion at taking kindness. The girl had suffered terribly in the store. Who could blame her for resenting the treatment?

"Turn yer cattle onter the stubble, so ye wun't have ter chase plumb over creation ter round 'em up," Uncle Sel told Luke and Asahel.

Dinner was an event long to be remembered in the lives of the children. Aunt Fat put the baby on her spotless bed, and bustled about cooking a great pot of carrots and another of potatoes, which she mashed and then beat to fluffy lightness. She made cole-slaw from crisp cabbage, and finally dropped great round pieces of dough into the pot of stewing chicken for dumplings. She had a stick-and-clay oven outside where she made pies and bread. A whole week's baking of pumpkin pies went into the stomachs of the immigrant family who had had no such dainties since starting across the plains.

In spite of herself, Salita warmed to the kindly old woman. She had intended to keep the settlers at a respectful distance, but Aunt Fat's kindness completely disarmed her.

After dinner was over, Aunt Fat declared her intention of minding the baby and keeping an eye on Wild Flower Ann and the children while Uncle Sel advised Salita and Luke about locating. They went

outside, where they could be free from the listening ears of the children and their mother.

"This air a fine rich kentry," Uncle Sel declared proudly, displaying his young trees and his barn and granary. "We came in 1844 and look at this yer farm now. Four year ago hit was jist prairie land with thet belt o' timber ye see yander. Me 'n' Aunt Fat is established an' livin' a heap better'n ever we did in Missoury."

"Who owns the deserted farm next to yours?" Luke wanted to know. "We looked it over and wondered if we could spend the winter there. If we could manage we would buy such a place, but that's not for this winter."

"All the good claims anyways anear Oregon City war taken up right at fust, but this here farm o' Caleb Richards's air for sale cheap; so's plenty o' others hereabouts, owin' ter fool menfolks rushin' off this summer ter the gold-fields in Californy. Couldn't wait ter harvest their craps, them fool men couldn't. Us as had sense ter sit ter hum'll make money next year sending our produce ter Californy."

"How much does Mr. Richards ask for his farm?" Salita longed to know, but feared to learn. She did want to settle in that cabin, but felt that it would be clear out of their reach.

"One hundred and fifty dollars air whut he 'lows the improvements air wuth. Land air ter be had here fer the takin'. No man in his proper senses 'u'd pay

fer hit. He'd jest move furder on up the valley and take his ch'ice."

Luke looked at Salita, waiting for her to answer, but she hesitated. No use to appear too eager. "Perhaps we could find a place cheaper than that," she said slowly, digging the heel of her boot into the soft soil.

"Like's not ye could," Uncle Sel admitted, "but this air close ter market, an' the children kin walk ter school to Oregon City.Ye got ter take sech-like things inter consideration."

They all admitted that this was true.

"Whut do ye aim ter pay, ef I mout inquire 'ithout makin' too bold?" Uncle Sel asked.

"We could pay that price," Salita said, "but it would leave us with no farm implements and no money to carry us through the winter." She had often watched her father's methods of bargaining. She was not going to jump at the first bait that was offered.

"Cale Richards left that farm in my hands for sale," Uncle Sel went on, noting her hesitation. He was a seasoned bargainer, too, but he meant for the girl to have the farm. Anyway, it didn't belong to him, he could afford to be rather generous; the season's immigration was practically over, there would be no opportunity of making a sale for a year. Cale had told him to get the best price he could, but the most he had expected was a promissory note to be paid when the next year's crop was disposed of.

Here was good luck, indeed, an immigrant family with money enough to pay cash for a farm. Appearances were certainly deceiving.

Uncle Sel had from the very first felt kindly toward the girl, and the fact that she had received shabby treatment from some of the meddlesome women led him to champion her all the more boldly. After talking the case over most of the evening with Aunt Fat, they had come to the conclusion that the girl was innocent of the charge that had been laid against her.

They had received her with open arms that morning. Salita was quick to notice the change in their manner, though they had not been openly unkind before. She was very anxious to make her home near them. Being alone in a strange new country has its terrors for a girl who has never before rubbed shoulders with the world.

"I will give you one hundred dollars now," Salita said, after a thoughtful knitting of the brows, "and my note for the other fifty. The cattle should be sufficient security."

"Done." Uncle Sel took her offer quickly lest she change her mind. "I'll give ye a writin' an' ye kin move right in. Like ez not hit'll be rainin' bull yearlin's by day after tomorrer."

He led Salita and Luke into the house and took a quill pen and a piece of foolscap paper and set about his work. "Cale Richards left them papers all made out for me ter fill in. I hain't any great shakes

at writin', but I reckon this'll hold. What's yer name, gal? Ye be o' age, be ye?"

"I thought I would never tell my name," Salita faltered, and colored painfully, "but of course I must have it on the deed. I don't want any trouble with the title, and I don't know much about such things. I'm nearly nineteen, and this is my own money. No one could make me trouble, could they?" she asked anxiously.

"No, they cain't, but I'll have John Barfield take keer o' hit ter make sure. I hain't much good at lawin'."

Salita started at the mention of the name Barfield. "I have no reason to feel friendly toward those people," she said with asperity. "That woman was going to take the children from me, or if we made trouble see that we were driven out of the country. They visited us Sunday morning on their way to church. Officious people! The call was not a pleasant one."

"Du tell!" Uncle Sel ejaculated, giving Aunt Fat a warning look. "I aim ter see ter hit thet they mind their own affairs. Young John Barfield air a fine lad. He'll keep his counsel ef I tell him how things stand."

But Salita was distressed. "They'll do their best to discredit us in the settlement. The judge said the country up Yamhill way would be a good place for us to locate. I mean to stay right here, and Luke and I will see to it that these children stay with us.

We'll ask no favors of anyone." Salita's swift anger rose again at the recollection of the Barfields' visit.

Uncle Sel gave a loud whistle and shot another warning glance at Aunt Fat.

"We'll look out fer ye. I'd admire ter put a spider in Miz' Barfield's dumplin," he laughed.

"Stay all night with us," Aunt Fat invited cordially, as Salita rose to go, after making arrangements to have her deed made out and duly recorded. She agreed to pay the money over as soon as the necessary formalities were gone through. Uncle Sel admired her for the way she handled her business.

"No, thank you," Salita refused with a smile. "We are anxious to sleep under our own roof. It seems too good to be true that we are actually located in our new home. We'll visit you some time soon," and taking the sleeping baby off the bed, she collected the children and departed.

"I know now whut ye was a-laughin' erbout this mornin'," Aunt Fat said severely when they were alone. "Ye jist aimed ter contrary Miz' Barfield by fetchin' thet family right next ter her."

"No, Ma, I hain't meant no offense, but likely she'll think hard all the same. Thar never war no love lost atween us, but bizness is bizness. I cain't let the chance ter turn a honest penny slip because Miz' Barfield don't approve of immigrants 'ith rafts o' children."

"I dunno ez I blame ye. I'm right glad ter have em for neighbors. That gal air well eddicated and

a lady born an' bred, no matter ef misfortune has ketched her. She'll come out yit an' be a credit ter us. Thet hain't her baby. I wanted ter ask her, but she didn't make me no openin', but she fed hit with a spoon an' cup. An' she's got the shape o' a slimpsey young gal. A womern whut's jist borned a baby shows hit. That's the chile o' Wild Flower Ann, sure's ye're a foot high, jist ez the gal sez. I aim ter make them wimmen take back their talk, er I ain't known ez Aunt Fat in this kentry."

"Yes," Uncle Sel agreed. "I war plumb scairt ye'd let the cat outen the bag whilst I was a dickerin' 'ith Sour Gal. Ef she knew that Barfield's farm j'ined thet one she jist bought on the north, the deal'd 'a' bin off."

"I got sense yit," Aunt Fat was scornful. "I knowed whut ye was up to, an' don't ever let me hear ye say ye didn't hev yer way when Miz' Barfield gits in her oar. I'm jist ez glad ez ye be ter help thet poor gal 'ith a addled womern and a hull family o' children on her han's. I aim ter put in my spare time a-knittin and a-patchin' fer 'em. An' mind ye don't quiz the pore thing erbout her trouble. She'll tell us soon ernough when she gits right good an' ready."

"I 'low ter la'rn them thar boys ter farm an' ter trade work 'ith em. We'll try ter round up ernough men ter raise a larger cabin fer em, too."

They spent the evening laying plans for assisting the immigrant family.

XIII

JOHN BARFIELD DOES A GOOD DEED

Dusk was settling as Salita and Luke, with the Harkness family in tow, reached their new home. They decided to sleep under cover that night, though Salita felt that she would save herself work if she waited to clean the tiny room thoroughly before moving their pitifully few belongings into it. She had saved only the most necessary garments and cooking-utensils. A change of clothing apiece was all the family had, but she had not grieved particularly when it had been necessary to discard them. Many a family had arrived in the Oregon country with no money and just the ragged clothing they stood in. They felt rich by comparison.

Luke laughed as they surveyed their possessions, and with the bluntness of boyhood said, "Never mind, Salita. In a few years we'll be turning up our noses at the dirty, low-lifed immigrants, just like those folks in the store did when we hove in."

Salita gave an exaggerated interpretation of Mrs. Barfield alighting from her shiny wagon and picking her delicate way into their camp. Spirits were high. Locating had been a vague nightmare to Salita and Luke, and here they were on a good claim two days after arriving in Oregon.

They were sorry that darkness came so soon. The children could scarcely wait until morning to explore their domain. How good the cheery fire in the hearth seemed. Salita took time after supper to rub baby Joe in its genial warmth. Poor baby, he had had so little of her time. Now she would take good care of him and he would grow and thrive. He stretched and crowed as the children crowded about to watch him. Wild Flower Ann—she insisted on being called by her new name—soothed Buddy to sleep and amused the children while Salita arranged temporary beds for them all on the floor.

After they were all asleep Luke sat with her for a long time planning the future. They counted the money carefully. They had $256 left. She had spent an even twenty dollars for supplies the Saturday before in the settlement. Beans and rice and flour they had, enough to last for some time. The cow would increase in her milk, now that she was free from hard travel and the grass was so strong and good.

"There are potatoes in the ground," Luke said. "Of course they'll be small, but that's a fair-sized patch. I shouldn't wonder if we have enough to take us a good way through the winter. We can buy garden supplies from Uncle Seldom. He has loads of squash and pumpkins stored in his barn, and there are turnips and parsnips and carrots in his field. I might be able to do work to pay for them."

"Yes," Salita agreed, "we must be forehanded in keeping food ahead. The first winter is always hard,

but we'll fight like tigers to keep enough to eat. If we are ever forced to ask for help, that'll be just the chance Mrs. Barfield is waiting for. She'll see that your mother and the children are taken from us."

"No one will take the childern or mother from us," Luke promised, but Salita had her misgivings. She was older than Luke and the experiences of the months on the plains had taught her the grimness of life. She had a streak of caution in her make-up that the optimistic Luke lacked.

Luke was for paying the other fifty dollars on the farm instead of giving a note as they had planned, but Salita was obdurate. "The children must have shoes to go to school and we will be obliged to spend at least fifty dollars for farm implements. We must have a doctor see what can be done for your mother, but perhaps we can persuade him to wait until fall for his pay."

"I can work and earn something this winter," Luke told her.

"You should be in school, yourself," Salita countered.

"Asahel must go," Luke said slowly, "but I can study nights, with you to help me over the hard places."

Salita finally agreed to this, though with reluctance. It was not fair to deprive Luke of his chance for an education, but she did not see how she could manage alone. Perhaps he could have at least a term later. Mattie Lou and Sissy and Asahel could take

their schooling now, though. She would not have children in her charge growing up in ignorance if she worked her fingers to the bone. No self-appointed committee from the Good Intent Society, or whoever it was that looked after the affairs of poor people in Oregon, should be able to say that they had not done their duty by the children.

"I have given up all hope that father is alive," Luke said sadly. "I kept looking back over the trail for traces of him, but the Indians killed him, I am sure of that now. I wonder if we hadn't best write a letter home to mother's folks and tell them what has happened to us. Uncle Riley Chatham will help us, I know. He talked some of emigrating; perhaps he will come next spring. A letter would reach him in three or four months, surely. How long does it take to go round the Horn?"

Salita did not know, but thought he would get the letter some time in the late winter. They would inquire next time they went to the settlement. Luke must write the next day.

The girl thought longingly of her home in Kentucky. She had no near relatives there now, only distant cousins, but if Cynthia Harkness's people came to take care of the children she could earn money to make her way back to her old home in a few years. Her name was an honorable one in the South. Her great-grandfather had been Governor of Virginia, long before the family came to Kentucky. She would have no trouble in making her liv-

ing teaching school there. She had had three years at a girl's seminary and felt fully qualified to make her own way in the world.

The candle guttered and threatened to go out before they finished their planning and thought of sleep. They must be up very early to explore their new domain.

The children could scarcely wait for daylight to make their tour of inspection. Wild Flower Ann, too, displayed the eagerness of a child. Directly after breakfast she disappeared with Lemuel and Buddy. Salita was relieved to see her go. She could amuse the small children and keep them from under her feet, and then, too, she had no uneasiness for the baby's safety while his mother was away.

Luke's first task was to improvise a rude bed for little Joe out of some split cedar shakes that he found piled near the small log shed that had served Cale Richards for sheltering his cattle. Later he promised Salita he would hollow out a log and put rockers on it for a proper cradle. This task accomplished, he took a long iron spoon—they had no gardening implements—and went out to see how the potatoes would turn out. A great deal depended upon that potato crop, though from the distance it did not promise much—the rows were scarcely discernible in the wilderness of pig-weed that covered the ground—still, great stories were told of yields in virgin land. Cale Richards had left early in August for the gold-fields in California. His farm gave evidence of his

thoroughness. Perhaps he had given his potatoes their last good hoeing before he left. If he had and laid them by as the custom was back in the States, there should be a good crop there in spite of the forest of weeds that had sprung up since the fall rains. Uncle Seldom wasn't sure of the amount of cultivation when he had spoken of the crop.

In a few minutes Luke, his face aglow, came running into the cabin with a bucketful of smooth even-sized potatoes. He had dug only two hills and they had yielded beyond his wildest hopes. There would be enough to last the family all winter, with seed for spring planting. His mind leaped ahead. He would dig them at once. Perhaps there would be a few to sell; potatoes brought an enormous price in California. Uncle Sel had said that the farmers who remained at home would reap the rewards of the gold-fields by shipping their produce there. The Harkness family had reached the Oregon country just in the nick of time.

Salita had spent a happy morning scrubbing the cabin—the puncheon floor responded readily to a wisp of straw and sand. Cale Richards was a bachelor and not over-nice in his housekeeping, but there was nothing that plenty of washing would not restore to cleanliness. She sent Mattie Lou over to see if Aunt Fat would sell her a little soft soap, and soon the child came back with a generous bucketful. Aunt Fat scorned the idea of charging a neighbor

for anything. Neighbors borrowed back and forth and changed work, she told Mattie Lou.

By noon the little cabin floor was dry and spotless. Salita had made the children play outside. The day was warm and sunny even if it was the first of November. The girl sighed as she worked. This was a lovely country. What a pity that she must leave it as soon as the children were provided for, but no woman could remain in a settlement where she did not bear a good name. A spotless character was a woman's dearest possession, to be guarded at any cost, and no matter if she were pure as the angels in heaven, the stain was there. Gossip about her would never cease so long as she lived. She wiped quick hot tears from her eyes with the back of her hand, and then hurried on about her work.

Well, anyway, there were compensations. The baby was a treasure to be cherished even if he had innocently brought shame upon her head. He smiled and gripped her finger tightly as she fed him. He was beginning to notice things. Poor little fellow! Traveling every day when he should have been sleeping quietly in a warm soft bed! Now he was going to put flesh on his spare little frame. Little Joe was the idol of the household, held more dear because each child kept a watchful eye on him for fear his mother would do him harm.

The morning passed swiftly. There was so little to set to rights that the cabin was soon in shape for living. The bed with one leg—it was nailed to the

wall on one end and side—was soon neatly spread with a blanket and the table made of pine boards scoured to its original purity. Tomorrow, Salita promised herself, she would wash, and then they would be all in order. Once the household was running smoothly, she would be able to direct Luke's work and help him as much as time afforded. They must all make the most of every moment if they were to provide a living for their large family.

Luke came in after turning the stock out in the pasture, and wanted to know if Salita didn't think he had better go to Oregon City and get a shovel or a digging fork so that he could commence harvesting the potatoes. They had Wyonoshut's pony, but he was jaded with the long trip and so were the oxen. He would walk. Salita suggested that he take the children, Mattie Lou, Sissy, and Asahel, and buy their shoes so that they could start to school right away. Luke rebelled at first. He said he didn't want to herd a crowd of young ones everywhere he went; but finally he reluctantly consented, and Salita set out a hasty dinner while she put Mattie Lou to scouring the molasses off the face of the ecstatic Sissy. Asahel she compelled to wash his ears. After a struggle the four set off as clean as possible with the means at hand, and Salita ate a bite, fed the baby and put him to bed, before she noticed that Wild Flower Ann had not come in for the noon meal.

She called, but there was no answer. She would take a little look about. There had been no time

thus far to examine the farm. A little stream ran below the log barn. How handy that was! The Oregon country was so well watered—she had heard that before they left Kentucky. The fences were in good condition, but there was still much land to be inclosed if the fields were to be enlarged. She went leisurely through the orchard, looking forward to the time when she would be able to prune the trees. Uncle Sel had promised to show them just how it was done. When she reached the top of the knoll, Mount Hood, snowy white and tinged faintly with mauve and pink as the afternoon sun lingered on it, burst into view. Salita shuddered. She was sure she would never find joy in gazing on that hideous mountain even in its smiling moods.

Wild Flower Ann was not anywhere about, so the girl went leisurely back through the orchard. She would bring the children in as soon as they began to clamor for something to eat. The quiet about the cabin was soothing to frayed nerves. She would rest the whole afternoon. It seemed to her, as she sat down by the fire, that she had never been idle for an hour at one time since she came to live with the Harkness family. Her days had been one prolonged, hideous nightmare since she left Kentucky, but now she had adjusted her shoulders to her responsibility, the pace would be steady but not so hurried. She would at least have an occasional moment of relaxation.

A dog barking brought her back to reality.

Alarmed for the moment, she stepped to the window and peeped out. A man on an Indian pony was riding up to the cabin. She had unstrapped her gun before she started to work in the cabin. Now she hastily reached for it and was fastening it in her belt as she responded to the knock on the door. How she hated the idea of a curious caller.

John Barfield stood at the door. He seemed embarrassed, but came in rather timidly without waiting for her invitation to enter. "Uncle Seldom said he was coming here this afternoon to make out the papers for the farm you have just bought," he stammered. His visit was evidently as distasteful to him as it was to her.

Salita remained standing and did not offer him a seat, though she knew that common courtesy demanded that she make at least a show of hospitality. But she was resolved that men in the settlement should not have the least excuse to take advantage of her because she had not the protection of parents or husband. An unattached woman had her way to fight in a new country, and she would give no quarter.

Her visitor stood in awkward silence, turning his soft felt hat round and round in long nervous hands, and still Salita did not open conversation. "I'll look down the road for Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat," he said when the situation became intolerable.

Salita, looking through the tiny window, saw the old couple and felt greatly relieved. The business

would soon be over and the scion of the Barfield family could not be on his way too quickly to suit her. John Barfield looked like his mother, and that alone was enough to make her dislike him. She sincerely hoped that there never would be any occasion for him to darken her door again.

"How be ye Sour Gal?" Uncle Sel said by way of greeting, and Aunt Fat moved at once to the baby's bed and took little Joe up, crooning and clucking to him in the effort to make him smile.

John Barfield took the papers from his pocket, together with a quill pen, and looked at Salita. She brought him ink and sat down by the fire.

"What is your full name, Miss—er," he faltered.

"I'm known as Sour Gal here," Salita returned.

"I told her ye'd keep yer counsel, ef she don't want her real name known here," Uncle Sel said to John. "She aims ter prove up on this here claim, so ye'll have ter write hit down ter file in the land-office accordin' ter law."

"Salita Prentiss," the girl said reluctantly, and John Barfield filled in the necessary data in the paper.

Salita had laid up the five twenty dollar gold pieces within easy reach; she handed them to Uncle Sel and signed the note for fifty dollars. Uncle Sel and John Barfield signed in security, without saying anything.

The visit was strained on both sides. "We're glad

to have you for neighbors," John Barfield said, taking his hat to go.

"Neighbors?" Salita echoed.

"We live on the farm just to the north of you," the young man said with a smile.

Dismay was written large on Salita's face, as she took in the situation.

"I didn't know," she faltered. "I would have preferred living farther from you. Your mother and I are not congenial, to say the least, though I assure you we will never molest you in any way."

"Mother means well," the young man stammered, turning a fierce red and edging toward the door, "but she's set in her way."

Uncle Sel was edging toward the door, too, not meeting Salita's eye. Aunt Fat had a satisfied "I told you so" expression.

"Did any of you meet Wild Flower Ann and the two younger children?" Salita asked with a start. It was nearly sunset and they had been away since early morning, and she had not thought of them since her visitors came. Hastily she explained. They were all alarmed as Salita pointed out the direction in which the simple woman had gone off in the morning with the children.

"I'll ride down that way and find them," John Barfield said as he mounted his horse. "They're likely not far."

"We'll keep an eye out ez we go hum," Uncle Sel promised.

As soon as they were out of sight, fear seized Salita. How careless she had been! She ran about, calling, but there was no answer.

Luke came up a little later with the older children, and immediately got the pony and started out; there was no time to be lost before dark. He came back when he could no longer see. "No use," he told Salita regretfully. "I'd only get lost in the timber."

They kept a candle in the window all that evening. Near midnight John Barfield returned, walking beside the horse that carried Wild Flower Ann and the two sleepy children.

"I found them in the Indian camp down the hill toward the river. Better keep an eye on them after this," he told Salita kindly.

She thanked him rather shamefacedly. How she hated being under obligation to him, and yet he had done a simple kindness that deserved gratitude.

XIV

AUNT FAT SPEAKS HER MIND

John Barfield was often put to it to keep in the good graces of his mother. Mrs. Barfield was one of those women who might be termed excessively virtuous. She walked the straight and narrow path herself and fairly dragged everyone else along in her wake. Hers was a domineering spirit; she ruled her family and her associates.

Secure in her sense of virtue and right action, she felt herself perfectly justified in enforcing her rules of conduct upon the whole community. She was its rightful social leader. Mrs. Barfield filled this position among the women of Oregon. While they followed her dictation willingly enough, still there were those among them who at times resented her show of superiority.

Mrs. Barfield was filled with indignation at what she termed the "cool insolence" of an abandoned young hussy. John Barfield and his father did their best to soothe and conciliate her for the affront she had so unwittingly suffered from Sour Gal, but still her wrath smoldered, ready to break out at the very slightest provocation.

John Barfield had not known of the location of the immigrant family on Cale Richards's place until he

met Uncle Sel in the road as he was going to round up some stray cattle. He gave a perplexed whistle as he took in the details of the story the old man told with satisfied chuckles.

"Kin pay cash money fer hit, so that gal kin, an' me expectin' ter get a note thet like ez not wouldn't be wuth the paper hit's writ on. Me 'n' Aunt Fat low ter git a heap o' satisfaction outen havin' em fer neighbors, too. Sorter watch them thar young uns grow up."

John Barfield assented and agreed to meet him at Cale Richards's place to draw up the papers, which Uncle Sel gave him, with the caution to keep his own counsel. He hurried after his cattle to make sure of being home to dinner, so that he might keep his appointment.

He meditated deeply as he rode through the timber. Mother was going to be displeased, quite put out, in fact, when she heard the news. For his own part, he would have preferred that they locate elsewhere—there would be no peace in the family now. But as Sour Gal had said, this was a free country. He had been sorry for the girl; she had so plainly seen better days. He thought his mother had been unnecessarily severe, but then that was the way with women, always ready to believe the very worst of their own sex.

Mother wouldn't be pleased if she knew that he made out the papers for Uncle Sel. He decided to

keep the news from her. She kept rather a close watch on his uprisings and down-sittings, but if she questioned him he could easily make the excuse that he had not found all the cattle; as a matter of fact, he must resume his search as soon as he finished the legal work.

His plan had worked very well up to the time of his visit to the immigrants, but his searching for the deranged woman and the little children had put an entirely different face on the matter. He muddled over his interview with the girl. Well, anyway, he knew her name. She was no more the mother of that baby than his own mother was. The poor thing had not had a fair deal. There was a certain cool defiance about her that intrigued him. He admired her dogged courage and the way she managed the children.

He had no difficulty in finding Wild Flower Ann and the children. There was an old Indian trail through the timber below Cale Richards's farm; when he struck it he had met a young Indian whom he knew very well and he told him that a *pelton* with two children was down in their village.

Wild Flower Ann worried him, too. If she took to running away, something would have to be done about it, and he was sure that the girl would resent any interference from the town authorities.

But an immediate problem loomed on his mental horizon. Here it was after midnight and his mother would be up walking the floor in her anxiety for his

safety. Just what would he tell her? Better make some excuse about running down that roan heifer even if it were a bit lame. Like a small boy in mischief he justified himself, and grinned in the darkness—he *had been* looking for that pesky heifer.

Sure enough, there was a light in the sitting-room. He saw his mother's shadow as she passed the window. She had kept a hot meal for him and he reproached himself as he noticed the lines of anxiety about her face. His mother had the power of reducing him to a pulp, no matter how much he determined beforehand to defy her when he knew that he had a right to his own way. Her very frailty and helplessness were her strength. One glance at the veins in her slender white wrists when she raised her hands in protest at his actions, and he capitulated. He loved his mother and cherished her, as his father had taught him from his very babyhood.

"I was so alarmed, John," Mrs. Barfield began.

"You shouldn't worry about me, mother," John soothed. "There is no telling where a cattle hunt may lead me. I've been clear down to the Indian village and haven't found that roan heifer yet."

His mother looked sharply at him, but said no more. He wondered if she knew that the immigrant family had moved into the neighborhood. His sense of guilt made him self-conscious, but he did not dare question her. There was an awkward silence for a moment; then Mrs. Barfield arose with dignity,

bade him good-night, and after lighting her bedroom candle left the room.

The news must have leaked out. It was uncanny the way mother detected his deception.

The Good Intent Society met the next day. Mrs. Barfield asked John to take her into Oregon City early in the morning. There was a quilt in the frames that would require a full day to finish, and she told him that his father had heard that the ship on which the missionary barrels were expected had arrived yesterday. There was a great deal to be attended to at this meeting.

"I shall have the ladies vote on giving that thankless immigrant family a donation of clothing," Mrs. Barfield confided with an air of conscious virtue. "That wanton hussy does not deserve help of any kind, but we are told in the Bible to forgive our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. We'll clothe them properly and try to bring that strumpet to a sense of sin, and then your father thinks we had best send them down to the Yamhill country. Oregon City is so burdened with the poor that it is only just that other sections of the country bear a share of the expense."

John waited for his mother to finish before he ventured a protest. She hated so to be interrupted.

"Mother, don't try to work off one of those missionary barrels on that family. Uncle Sel says they have money. He saw the girl, Sour Gal, give Bill Marcy eighty dollars in gold to go to the help of his

brother-in-law. Wait and find out their circumstances before you take any action," he pleaded, his guilty knowledge weighing heavily upon him.

"You are not qualified to settle such matters as the dispensing of charity," Mrs. Barfield told him severely, her lips closing in a firm thin line indicating that so far as she was concerned the argument was closed.

Women with generous baskets of luncheon on their arms were already going into the church as Mrs. Barfield and John drove up. An all-day session of the Good Intent Society, when missionary barrels arrived, was an event long to be anticipated.

Aunt Morning Ann Simmons, fat and good-natured, and Martha Bainbridge with her daughter, Rose Ann Skelton, and her twins, were coming down the road. Aunt Fat drove up a bit later. Uncle Sel, for once, was willing to hitch up the oxen. He had business in Oregon City that day. Most of the men had gone to the gold-fields in California in August, but he meant to rally those who were left to build a commodious double cabin for the immigrant family who had just bought Cale Richards's farm.

He had not mentioned his intention to Sour Gal, knowing that she might raise strenuous objections. The festivity was to be in the nature of a surprise party, with the women bringing generous supplies of food. He chuckled to himself over the outcome of his feat. The girl deserved the assistance that the men of the community were always willing to render new-

comers, but if she knew of it beforehand she would resent the help from those whom she felt misjudged her.

The quilting went merrily on. Rose Ann Skelton had all she could do to keep her mischievous twins in hand—like children from time immemorial, they persisted in crawling under the quilting-frames and poking little round heads up under the quilt, to the hindrance of the workers; retreating before sharp thumps of the thimble, they almost upset the quilting-frames.

The talk of the neighborhood went round; there was a new baby over Kansas City way. The Indians had stolen a cow and calf from Luther Murphy. Gottleib Smoot had some pretty new calico that came in on yesterday's ship. Bill Marcy had gone early Sunday morning to the rescue of his sick sister and her family, who could not get around Mount Hood. Shuddering fear was expressed for the suffering family. The Barlow Road in late fall was a recent memory to many of the women. This brought the conversation back to the immigrant family who had brought the news of Bill Marcy's sister.

Nettie Harper, sharp of nose and long of tongue, expressed herself freely in regard to the girl with the young baby. "Better a girl be laid in her coffin than bear a fatherless child," she averred. "It's bad enough when the girl has a sense of wrong, but this one is bold as brass—walks right into the store before our modest girls in shirt and britches and a gun

at her belt. As if she needed to defend herself from us decent folks."

Aunt Fat seldom had anything to say in a gathering, but after a moment she spoke slowly: "Pa called her Sour Gal. He's the beatenest one for namin' folks. Sour Gal 'lowed she hadn't nuthin' but men's britches ter wear. Ye mind that addled womern thet wuz with her? She wun't own thet baby—hain't known nuthin' since hit war borned. The trail done tuk her senses. That gal's as innercent o' wrong-doin' ez ye be, Nettie Harper. Ye're committin' a deadly sin ter suspicion her. Almighty God'll hold ye ter account fer yer gossipin' tongue."

The group of quilters paused with needles poised in amazement. Aunt Fat had never done so much talking before in all the time she had lived in Oregon.

"Then you don't believe the evidence of your own eyes and ears," Nettie Harper said sneeringly, stung by Aunt Fat's open rebuke.

"I don't believe ennythin' I hear, an' only half I see, an' I cain't see ez well as I useter," Aunt Fat said slowly, holding a needle against the light in a futile effort to thread it.

"Aunt Fat is right," Martha Bainbridge said in her gentle way. "We must give the girl the benefit of the doubt. Awful things happen to mothers on the trail. If she needs friendliness, now is the time for us to show it. Where did the family locate? Rose Ann and I will go over soon and spend the day with her."

There was a gleam in Aunt Fat's eye. "Uncle Sel

done sold 'em Cale Richards's Donation Claim. They paid fer hit in gold, too. Don't 'pear lak they're edzactly objects o' charity. I recollec' some o' us didn't look so all-fired dressed up when we landed in the settlement a few years agone."

There was a chorus of laughter at this sally—laughter that was intended to cover up Mrs. Barfield's discomfiture. Every woman present rather enjoyed the joke on their worthy president, knowing that she would not relish such neighbors. But Mrs. Barfield betrayed no emotion. They left wondering if she knew this bit of news before or whether she had such self-control that she gave no sign. No one of the women except Nettie Harper had any suspicion of the girl whom they had not seen, though they all admitted after the meeting broke up that they would not like to have such a female move onto the farm next to them if they had a good-looking son of marriageable age.

The meeting closed as the quilt was finished and taken from the frames. It was greatly admired—an Irish chain pattern made of beautiful calico pieces. Mrs. Barfield had been saving these scraps for years. She made known her intention of binding it herself. No needle-woman in the settlement could hem to suit her.

They were all sorry that the missionary barrels had not yet been brought up from the landing on the river, but surely next week they would be able to do the unpacking, and in the mean time the mat-

ter of the family of young children and the insane mother must be looked into.

Most of the women signified their intention of attending the cabin-raising, even if their menfolks were not at home. Perhaps they could help that poor girl get some sewing and patching done for the children. She must have her hands full with a young baby that its mother wouldn't own, as Aunt Fat said.

"She's a pert likely gal, too, an' in my estimatin' deservin', but spunky ez they come. Ye'd best look alive how ye contrary her. She hain't no call ter feel friendly ter the settlers, fer the way they done her in Smoot's store. It'll take a heap o' kindness ter make her disremember them sly looks an' the womern drawing their skirts ter one side lak she'd sile 'em." Aunt Fat climbed nimbly into the wagon as Uncle Sel drove the oxen up for her. She had done more talking in public meeting than she had ever accomplished before in her life, and take it on the whole, she was well pleased with her day.

"How'd Miz' Barfield take the news o' Sour Gal a-comin' in fer ter be her next neighbor?" Uncle Sel wanted to know, but Aunt Fat would not give him any satisfaction. She sat in erect silence on the seat beside him all the way home.

Uncle Sel was wont to laugh at the doings of the Good Intent Society. She would not regale him with an account of the day's happenings.

"I done rounded up erbout a dozen men. We aim ter raise a good cabin for Sour Gal next Chewsday The young lads'll all admire ter come. I recken we'll get right smart done erbout thet thar claim." But Aunt Fat did not respond.

XV

THE CABIN-RAISING

SALITA spent a busy week. Every garment the family owned had been washed and mended. The children would start to school the next Monday and she meant to have them appear as well as possible. Already they were resplendent in new shoes of strong cowhide with copper toes.

On the memorable Tuesday morning of the cabin-raising Salita had risen early in order to drive her work so that she could help Luke and Asahel with the potato-digging. The boys had not been successful in securing a spade in the settlement. Every digging implement in the town had been shipped to the gold-fields; not even a hoe was to be had. But Uncle Sel, after digging his abundant crop of potatoes, had loaned Luke his shovel.

Looking out the window of the cabin, Salita saw the first of the cavalcade descending upon her. They had had no callers heretofore, for which she was duly thankful, but now three wagons loaded with women and children were coming in through the pasture bars. Her first wild impulse was to gather up the sleeping baby and run away, anywhere, clear back into the woods. She would rather have faced a

firing-squad than that company of curious women and children, but escape was out of the question; they knew the family were at home, as Wild Flower Ann was in the dooryard with the younger children, busy braiding a rope of the scarlet leaves of the vine maple generously interspersed with white snowberries, while she sang her monotous song.

"Tu rinki tu ri, tu rila ri."

Just behind the wagons strode a dozen men and boys with saws and axes over their shoulders. She took in the situation at a glance—they had come, according to the pioneer custom, to assist the new arrivals in establishing themselves in their home.

With what dignity she could muster Salita stepped into the dooryard as the children clambered from the wagons, followed by the decorous descent of the women. Aunt Fat and Uncle Sel were just behind. Aunt Fat began a round of introductions as welcoming hands were outstretched. "Sour Gal, take the acquaintance of Miz' Bainbridge, and this is her datter, Rose Ann Skelton, an' Miz' Harper and her gal, Julia Margaret." Aunt Morning Ann Simmons was there, and Celintha Roper from Abernethy Creek, and the Dodds and the Cumminses from the Kansas City neighborhood, together with a number of other women whose names she did not catch.

The men came up and the same formula was gone through until it seemed to Salita that she would

sink through the ground in embarrassment, though she held her own without flinching. No matter how much she might resent their coming, still a hostess owed a degree of courtesy to her guests, even though they had descended upon her without invitation.

"Us menfolks 'low ter raise a bigger cabin fer ye, Sour Gal," Uncle Sel explained, "an' men a-workin' in the woods need a power o' vittles, so we fotched the wimmenfolks erlong ter provide grub fer 'em an' like ez not they kin help ye out with yer sewin' and' sich between spells."

The men lost no time in getting into the woods to cut the timbers for the cabin. The whine of their cross-cut saws reverberated as the women unpacked their baskets and carried them into the cabin. Such quantities of food as those baskets contained. There were dressed chickens ready for the huge pot that they swung on the crane. Jugs of rich milk and bowls of cream so thick it would hold up the spoon were set on the table. They carried Dutch ovens with them. Martha Bainbridge was already mixing the dough for her famous sour-cream biscuits.

In spite of her efforts to hold to her reserve, Salita was drawn to the kindly women, who took turns in nursing the baby, admiring his red curls, and commending her for the way he was thriving in spite of his long, trying journey. Aunt Morning Ann Simmons had brought a generous supply of her simples for the use of the family in case there was sickness that winter. "Hit takes a body awhile

ter git sech things ter growin'," she told her hostess. "I'll give ye a start o' everything fer yer cabin dooryard."

Each woman had a gift from her store. There was yarn ready for knitting into warm stockings for the children; wild-duck feathers enough for a fat pair of pillows. A dress length of home-woven woolen goods was proudly displayed. "We'll have time to cut and sew it after dinner," some one promised. "It's right hard to keep a women in clothes on the trail." The girl colored. This was a delicate allusion to her unconventional attire.

"Do ye reckon Doc Histler could do anything fer that pore addled women?" Nettie Harper wanted to know of Aunt Morning Ann.

"She'll come ter herself in time," was the ready response, as they shook sorrowful heads at Wild Flower Ann, who was happy showing the children her simple treasures from the woods—acorn cups and the bright hips of the wild roses that she was stringing for necklaces for them while she sang of John's sad experience with the rattlesnake.

Long before noon the oxen were drawing up the logs for the addition to the cabin. Uncle Adzi Clark had come along with his niece, Martha Bainbridge. John Bainbridge and the boys had gone to the gold-fields. He was feeble and bent with rheumatism, though he intended to superintend the making of the stick-and-clay chimney as he had done at every cabin-raising in the community since he arrived in

'43. He was showing the boys just how to split the sticks for laying in a double row like two Virginia worm fences. The boys and girls had been set to carrying the wet clay for covering this framework as soon as the timbers of the cabin were in place.

The Barfields arrived toward the middle of the morning. Mrs. Barfield, dainty in a black-and-white calico dress, greeted Salita civilly. The judge went at once to the timber where the men were working, but young John lingered a perceptible moment under the pretext of making his mother comfortable. He glanced at Salita, taking in the curve of her white neck and the flame of her red hair as if he had not seen her before, a fact which the women were quick to notice, nudging one another when Mrs. Barfield was not looking.

Mrs. Barfield surveyed the donations like a general before a battle, announcing her intention of beginning at once to make the dress. The women who were not engaged in cooking sprang to help her.

"What is your name, my good girl?" she asked Salita as she took her dressmaker's chart from her reticule and spread it out on the bed.

"Uncle Sel has named me Sour Gal," Salita said firmly, looking her inquisitor straight in the eye.

"That's just a bit vulgar, isn't it?" Mrs. Barfield was gently reproachful.

"It will serve," Salita returned with finality.

She had been warmed with the friendliness of the women, and felt gratitude for the dress, but when

Mrs. Barfield began sewing on it, she knew that now she would never wear it. That prim severe woman with her patronizing manner brought out the worst in her. Never would she receive charity at the hands of an enemy. Yet she said nothing while her measurement was taken and the chart put into use in the cutting. It is difficult to make a stand before a cabinful of women.

"Sour Gal we must call you, then, until you see fit to tell your name," Mrs. Barfield said in a voice that held an edge of steel in spite of its apparent graciousness.

The Ridgely boys from out Hardscrabble way had come, uninvited, to the cabin-raising. The men glanced at one another with just a bit of apprehension, still they were glad of their help. Nick and Joel Ridgely were considered hard characters in the settlement. It had been hoped that they would go to the gold-fields and remain away indefinitely, but they had a bedridden mother, and only two of the four sons of the family had departed. It was suspected that they made liquor. Two or three fights resulted from their attendance at peaceful gatherings when some one had brought along a demijohn.

Before the men had been in the woods an hour, they had reason to believe that a jug of "blue ruin," that potent drink made of crude molasses from the Sandwich Islands that served to slake the thirsts of the rougher element when wheat whisky could not

be secured, was hidden somewhere about the premises.

Uneasily the older men watched the boys disappear behind the log barn. It was not safe to protest; that would have started an immediate fight. Matters did not mend as the morning wore on, and by the time the horn blew for dinner the Ridgely boys were rather the worse for wear.

Dinner was spread outside. Fortunately, the day was sunny and warm for November. Tables had been improvised from puncheons—small fir logs split evenly in half lengthwise. They would later be used split side up for the cabin floor.

What a dinner the women had provided! Oregon flowed with milk and honey now that the farms were producing. The inevitable stewed chicken with great fat dumplings was abundant, flanked by cold saddles of venison, and the roasted wild geese so plentiful in the sloughs at this time of the year. Women vied with one another in the matter of quivering wild-blackberry jelly and rich jam made pound for pound with sugar that came in quantities from the Sandwich Islands, where the cane plantations were beginning to yield. There were a baker's dozen pumpkin pies, luscious with eggs and rich cream, and Aunt Morning Ann Simmons had brought along one of her famous salt-pork cakes, made of finely diced pork and molasses and sundry spices. This cake she baked in a huge milkpan. No gather-

ing worthy of the name was complete without this delicacy.

There was little talk at first while the sour-cream biscuits went the rounds and the mountains of mashed potatoes diminished under the keen appetites of men who had spent a strenuous morning in the woods. Salita hated to appear at the table, but her excuses of minding the baby were overruled. She took her place rather shyly, attending to the wants of the smaller children and Wild Flower Ann, for the board this time was long enough to provide for everyone, so the youngsters were not obliged to wait for the second table.

Judge Barfield, at the head of the table, had said the grace—the minister was detained by illness—and the meal was half over before the wild young bloods made a remark of any kind, though both men and women eyed them anxiously. There was going to be no trouble from the Ridgely boys this time. Everyone was breathing easier.

Dinner over, the women hastened to "red" the table. Leaving dishes standing a moment after a meal was an unforgivable sin among good housekeepers, and besides, there was a mountain of work to be cleared away in the afternoon.

The men did not display such haste to go back to work. They gathered in little knots, smoking leisurely pipes and exchanging political views. Nick Ridgely winked and beckoned to two or three of the men who were known to like a nip of liquor when

it could be secured without expense. Oregon had a prohibition law two months before Maine, and the making of intoxicants was forbidden and the rule against drinking was strictly enforced from the very first days in the settlement; still, men will be men.

Nick's friends followed him at discreet intervals, returning to the group about the cabin one at a time. Nick had evidently tarried to finish off the jug of "blue ruin." He had difficulty in carrying his liquor when he rejoined the men about the cabin.

Salita was just finishing the dish-washing, aided by Rose Ann Skelton and Julia Margaret Harper —the other women had repaired to the cabin to sew and knit—when he came up. Nick was in a confidential mood. He addressed the men in a loud aside. "I aim ter come here courtin' soon. This here Sour Gal air the purtiest gal thet's come inter the settlement so far."

"Don't fergit she carries a shootin'-iron," Uncle Sel warned, and the men laughed at the pleasantry.

"Liker'n not hain't loaded," Nick laughed. "A gal whut wears britches and carries a baby whut she cain't explain ain't like ter be any too perticular. She's right pert and a hard worker. Make me a good wife, once she settles down." He started a ribald laugh, but it died in his throat. John Barfield had seized him by the collar, spun him round on his unsteady feet, and struck him in the face with the

flat of his hand before he realized what had happened to him.

"I'll teach you to insult a defenseless girl," his assailant told him, his voice coming hoarsely between clenched teeth. "I hate to soil my hands on you, but I've a mind to break every bone in your worthless body." He was delivering well-directed blows at the surprised Nick, who, on recovering his equilibrium, began to fight in dead earnest.

The men hastened to separate them, but John Barfield had received a cut over the eye before the fight was over. Joel Ridgely drew his brother away as soon as he could get a hand on him. "Ye hain't no call ter fight when ye cain't carry yer likker," he told him in sharp reproof. Joel had no mind to engage in a brawl when his opponents would be three to one or better. "I'll take ye home, thet's whut I'll do right now," he told Nick with asperity, holding him to his feet with a firm grip on his collar.

Salita stood with floods of angry red dying her face and neck. She stepped forward as Nick and Joel were turning to leave. "Just step foot on my premises again and I'll shoot you just as I would a polecat," she told Nick. "I'm not so defenseless as you may suppose. My gun is always loaded and I learned how to use it long ago."

Spent with her wrath, she turned and followed John Barfield into the cabin. For the first time she looked at him and really saw him. He caught a

glance that carried gratitude, and felt repaid for the cut over his eye that was bleeding freely.

Salita went for a clean white cloth to make a bandage, and Aunt Morning Ann Simmons washed and dressed the cut. Mrs. Barfield pressed her thin lips together without a sound. She glanced at her son as though he were a stranger to whom she had not been introduced.

The men went to the woods immediately and the women resumed their work without comment. Mrs. Barfield's rigid presence forbade discussion.

Before time to leave, a substantial double cabin had been completed. There was space for the family now—a porch inclosed with shakes connected the two rooms. The roof of new shakes would turn the winter rain. A commodious chimney in the new ell would supply generous heat.

"I aim ter sell ye a glass window right cheap," Uncle Sel promised Salita as he was leaving. "I'll fetch hit over tomorrow."

Salita looked about her when the settlers had gone. They would live in comfort that winter, but what a price to pay for a cabin! She had been humiliated before the whole settlement. The story would be in everyone's mouth in a few days. Gossip was scarce in the country and this was a choice morsel. She hated the cabin for the moment.

Mrs. Barfield did not condescend to notice John until they were well on the way home. When she turned to him at last she spoke sternly: "John Bar-

field, you have disgraced your father and me. There was no call for you to rise to the defense of that strumpet. The older men would have attended to Nick Ridgely without interference from you. The women did not dare say anything in my presence, but they'll spread the story that you are more than casually interested in that hussy."

For the first time in his life John Barfield faced his mother squarely. "Mother, I'll not hear you or anyone else speak disparingly of that poor girl. I'm glad I fought Nick Ridgely, and I mean to fight any other man who speaks a light word about her." His lips set in a line exactly like hers, although they were full young lips more given to laughter.

They completed their homeward journey in a silence that was thick and oppressive.

XVI

THE SUNFISHING CAYUSE

The cabin, now that it was completed, was warm and comfortable. As a special concession Uncle Sel sold Salita a small four-paned window for three dollars. He told her that glass was high and scarce, having to be brought clear around the Horn, but he had picked up two or three used windows when the Methodist mission property was sold. The Island Milling Company was turning out sashes and doors. The window complete would cost five dollars. This was a large sum of money when they were so likely to run short before they could realize anything from their crops, but it seemed an immediate necessity.

They used the new room as a general living-quarters—the fireplace was designed for cooking. The space between the two was for storage of wood and supplies, and the old cabin made comfortable sleeping-quarters. There was plenty of good oak wood and the fireplace here kept the room dry and warm with an occasional fire.

Uncle Sel had helped Luke fashion some rude furniture out of two dollars' worth of lumber from the mill; seven dollars the housekeeping outfit had cost them, a small sum for such convenience, but still Luke

and Salita had many anxious moments over their finances after the family had gone to bed in the evening.

The winter was passing swiftly. Christmas would soon be at hand. There had been a great deal of rain and a few clear frosty days alternating with fog like a thick white blanket over the land, but no snow as yet. The cattle were actually fattening, though they never came into the barn, but grazed on heavy grass through the days and spend the nights in the shelter of the fir timber. They felt sure that if they were obliged to sell the next fall, their stock would take care of the fifty dollar note. There was, so far, no cause for anxiety about meeting their obligations.

The potatoes turned out even better than they had expected. There was an ample supply for their needs and enough for spring seeding. Luke dug them at once and made a bin in the barn, covering it carefully with straw that he hauled from Uncle Sel's stack.

Flour was high—four cents a pound. Aunt Fat instructed them in the grinding of wheat in their coffee-mill, and showed Salita how to make nourishing wheat hominy that took the place of bread. They were in no danger of suffering for food, though their ration was monotonous. The baby and Lemuel and Buddy required most of the milk, waxing plump and healthy on the simple food.

At hog-killing time Aunt Fat sent for Salita to help her with the work of rendering lard and pre-

paring the hams and bacon for the winter, paying her all too generously, the girl knew, in lard and ham and side pork.

Asahel and Mattie Lou trudged daily to school, with Sissy in their wake. Salita took up a stocking for each of the little girls and they knitted as they walked along, after the fashion of the other girls in the school. Every member of the family must be kept constantly occupied. Wasting time was considered a cardinal sin.

Wild Flower Ann knit feverishly while the spell was upon her, but cast her work aside like a petulant child if she wished to roam through the woods or amuse herself playing with Lemuel and Buddy. Salita scarcely had time to notice her, though she took care that she did not lead the children off when she went on pilgrimages. The poor woman grew more simple and childlike each day. Her memory failing almost completely except for rare flashes.

Her absorbing passion was to pay visits to the Indian village near the river. The Indians understood her and were kind. Their name for the insane was *pelton*, Salita learned. A demented man named Pelton had been taken off a ship in the first days of the Hudson's Bay Company's occupation of Oregon, and so his name had been applied ever since to the insane. The Indians regard insanity with superstition and will go out of their way to show a kindness to the sufferer. Many a cured sal-

mon and bag of dried huckleberries Wild Flower Ann brought from the Indian camp that winter.

Salita did not leave the place except to help Aunt Fat an occasional day or so. There was so much to do that she scarcely found time to breathe. The clothing was thin and required constant patching. Stockings must be carefully darned if they were to last the winter. Often she sat up far into the night, with Luke keeping her company with his books, in order to send the children to school clean and decently clad the next day.

She kept hoping that she could secure material for a dress for herself. The streak of perversity in her nature prevented her from wearing the dress the women had so thoughtfully provided for her, because Mrs. Barfield had taken a hand in the making of it. She could have received it in the spirit in which it was tendered but for that unfortunate circumstance.

The girl finally decided to make it over for Wild Flower Ann. By putting in larger gores under the arms and letting down the hem and facing it, the fit was well enough.

Luke was able to trade work with Uncle Sel, who derived an immense satisfaction from having him with him. They split rails together and repaired and made fences. John Barfield rode over one day to see if the boy could help with some fencing; the cattle were always breaking out and straying, he explained. A dollar a day was the going wage for

such work and Luke was glad of the chance to earn a bit of ready money. After two weeks of work John Barfield and his father had taken a great liking for the serious-minded boy who was working evenings at his studies and struggling daytimes to take a father's place in the family.

At butchering-time Mrs. Barfield sent over fresh liver and promised hams and bacon when they were smoked. She would do her duty as she saw it, even if she could not countenance "that abandoned hussy" as she persisted in calling Sour Gal in her son's presence. Little children should not be made to suffer for the wrong-doings of their elders; they must be fed and clothed even if that hardened girl did persist in wearing men's clothing and carrying a gun at her belt.

Wyonoshut, rather gaunt and thin, came to their cabin late one evening after his pony. He told them that Mrs. Wilkinson had died before her husband reached her. The family were with the Marcys. Luke heard in a roundabout way from the Silcox family. They had chosen a different road through the Deschutes country and reached the settlement ahead of them. They had located somewhere in the Yamhill country. Granny Silcox had succumbed on the trail. Salita cried when she heard the news. How she longed to see Granny Silcox again! If only she had lived, perhaps the stain on her name could have been wiped out, but now that hope was gone. She moved about in a cloud of dull despondency for a few

days, until her work engrossed her again. One must just live on in the face of sorrow and loss. She had the children to consider and must go on as if nothing else mattered.

The weeks of December passed. John Barfield nearly always dropped in to see Luke and encourage him with his studies when he passed the farm. He had taken a great fancy to Luke, and there was really no reason why Salita should treat him rudely. After all, he could not help looking like his mother, and he had done her more than one kindness. She found herself visiting with John in spite of her efforts to hold aloof. He seemed to bring her back somehow into the life she had lost. He brought an occasional book to Luke, though Salita knew that he meant them for her pleasure as well. The *Spectator*, published in Oregon City, was five dollars a year. They could not afford a subscription; realizing this, he often brought back numbers with him. She was grateful for the books and papers, though she had but scant time to read.

The week before Christmas, Salita realized that she must provide something for holiday festivities. Children must not be disappointed on Christmas morning, even though money was low. She would make popcorn balls to round out the stockings that they would hang by the fireplace, and she resolved to spare enough for a stick of striped peppermint candy for each of them. She must go to Oregon City, though she quailed before the very thought of ap-

pearing there in men's clothing. Surely the way would open soon to secure cloth of some kind for a dress. But this time she must put her pride in her pocket, strap the gun in her belt, and do the shopping with head held high, looking to neither the right nor the left. She was anxious, too, to learn the news of his family from Tom Wilkinson. She would visit Bill Marcy's blacksmith shop while she was in town.

Saturday was the only day she could manage. Aunt Fat was more than willing to look after the baby, and she would send Wild Flower Ann and Buddy and Lemuel over in charge of the little girls, so that there would be no occasion to worry. Saturday was market day, and most of the farmers would be in town, but this could not be helped; this was the only day open to her without keeping Mattie Lou out of school, a procedure not to be entertained for a moment.

The morning was frosty and cold. She and Luke started early, intending to be away all day. She had a little over one hundred dollars left, and must spend a portion of that for supplies. Beans and rice and molasses surely did melt before the appetites of a family of healthy children.

They carefully skirted Gottlieb Smoot's store where most of the settlers did their trading. No one spoke to her in the other post. She spent twenty dollars grudgingly, tempted to buy a length of calico—eight yards at one dollar a yard, but resisted the im-

pulse. Better wait awhile and see how the money held out. She would have no occasion to leave home again until spring, and men's clothing was easier to get about in while doing farm work, anyway. She had worn trousers so long now that she felt no self-consciousness.

Toward the middle of the afternoon they made their way to Bill Marcy's blacksmith shop, only to hear that Tom Wilkinson had taken his little family to a claim over in the Taulity country about fifteen miles to the south and west. His brother-in-law had helped him out and the girls were old enough to keep house and care for the children.

Judge Barfield came into the smithy to have his horses shod while they were waiting to speak to Bill Marcy. She would rather not have met him there, but he spoke cordially to her, shaking hands and asking after the children just as if she were one of his friends. He was a pleasant, dignified man who had a way of putting people at their ease.

While they were passing the time of day there was a commotion in the street. A young man whom she had not seen before had just brought in a wild bunchgrass cayuse and was preparing to ride him for the first time. Everyone gathered at the door to watch the fun. Horse-breaking was one of the principal diversions in Oregon City. The horse was a splendid specimen, a claybank with darker mane and tail. Salita, raised among good horses, followed. There was nothing she loved better than to

see a spirited animal ridden for the first time. She forgot herself in watching the preparation to mount him.

Eager young men jumped to help the owner adjust the saddle, blindfolding the frantic horse while they tightened the girth and held his quivering nostrils to force the cruel Spanish bit with the biting wheel in the center between his teeth.

The Ridgely boys, Nick and Joel, were very much in evidence. They had a country-wide reputation for fearless horsemanship. Nick offered to mount first. Salita felt that he did this in a spirit of bravado—just to show off a bit before her. He had not spoken to her as she stood in the background, though she saw him looking at her rather shamefacedly.

Bets went round. The men hastily made up a purse for the rider who could subdue this stubborn piece of horse determination. A ten-dollar gold piece was the reward. Breaking a wild cayuse to the saddle was a sight no man would miss if he could help it. Women came to the exhibition, too, if they chanced to be in town.

With loud guffaws Nick adjusted his spurs and swung into the saddle, while Joel jerked the bandage from the eyes of the terrified animal. At first surprise overcame him at the unaccustomed weight on his back. He stood stock-still for a long second while the crowd that had gathered waited in hushed ex-

pectancy. Nick smiled and waved a hand to the bystanders.

The cayuse was gathering his forces. As he drew his four feet together the rider braced himself confidently. Instantly the creamy head with the flowing mane was gathered to the four feet as the horse leaped high in the air. The crowd was a bit disappointed. This was a straight bucker; keeping the saddle would be easy. There would be no fun, after all, just a long series of straightaway bucking. Any experienced rider could break this cayuse; conquering him was just a simple matter of endurance. Nick waved triumphantly to the bystanders in the intervals between plunges. When the animal paused to rest, he forced him to action with the sharp spurs.

Such tactics went on for quite a while, the crowd becoming a bit bored. But intuition was working in the surly head of the mount. Straight bucking was getting him nowhere. Try as he would, he could not dislodge the rider. The spurs drew gouts of blood on his belly. Bucking seemed to please his tormenter. He drew himself up for a supreme effort and accomplished nothing. Then with a feint that caught Nick off his guard the wily cayuse threw himself sideways in the air. Surprised, Nick pulled savagely on the bit; blood colored the foam at the pony's mouth.

The men woke up. Sunfishing was he? This would take some riding. Nick had been too confi-

dent, after all. The pony leaped sideways again. In an effort to save his balance Nick pulled on the bit, pulled so suddenly that the horse fell over backward. Nick made a frantic grab for the saddle horn.

The crowd jeered. To "choke the horn" was not sporting. But so far as Nick was concerned the contest was over. His grip gave way and he fell heavily. Joel sprang to the animal's head to jerk him out of the way of his prostrate brother.

"I told ye yer leave 'blue ruin' alone this morning," he exclaimed indignantly, helping Nick to his feet. "Ye hain't no call ter 'pull leather' right afore the hull settlement."

It seemed to Salita that all of Oregon City had gathered in front of the blacksmith shop by this time. John Barfield had arrived with his mother, and Nettie Harper was there with her daughter. The girl shrank into the background with fascinated eyes on the stubborn horse, who stood awaiting developments and meanwhile gathering wind to make further resistance to his enemies. Talk went gayly round; the purse was raised to twenty dollars, but no one ventured to mount, though several of the younger daredevils measured him carefully. A cayuse must be conquered at the first riding. He would be gentle and tractable once he owned a master. If he won out the first time he could never be trusted afterward. At length the owner, who answered to the name of Dod Tompkins, announced his intention of making the supreme effort, though riding a sun-

fishing horse was a risk; everyone acknowledged the fact.

When the blind was jerked off his eyes the cayuse pursued the same open tactics. Dod rose easily, though warily; he was not going to be caught by any sudden maneuver. Over and over he forced bucking, plying spurs vigorously when he lagged. Again sunfishing began. The sideways movement threatened to dislodge the rider each time, but he held erect in the saddle, swaying in the opposite direction when his mount leaped in the air. Salita, accustomed to horses, recognized his superior horsemanship. Never once did he pull on the bit. Jerking at the rein of a bucking horse will invariably pull him over backward.

Sunfishing did no good. The rider sat firmly in the saddle. With a last supreme effort the cayuse whirled suddenly with all four feet in the air, completely changing ends with himself. Dod was thrown clear.

Again the men sprang to seize the bridle. "Ye rode 'em straight up, anyway," they comforted, assisting him to arise and wipe the blood from a cut in his forehead. "No pullin' leather nor horn-chokin'."

"I don't want the blame horse," Dod said when he could speak. "He'll never be no good fer ridin'. He's plumb ruined now. Might as well shoot him and be done with it, unless some one will ride him."

The men were loath to lose the fun. The hat went

round again. Fifty dollars for riding that sunfishing horse! Bill Marcy held up the money, but no one volunteered. Dod fingered his gun a moment. "I'll throw in the horse, too," he said, and laughed in the direction of the young men. Fifty dollars and a good horse is a young fortune, and yet none of you smart alecks are coming forward."

John Barfield, watching Salita out of the corner of his eye—he was always watching her so—saw her pale and then color. For a bare moment she hesitated, then stepped into the group about the horse, who stood with sullen head down, and fore feet braced defiantly.

"Let me ride him with a hackamore and I'll break him," she said in a voice loud enough to carry to everyone present. Nettie Harper raised horrified hands in Mrs. Barfield's direction. Judge Barfield started guiltily. He had added five dollars to the hat when it was passed around, in spite of his wife's frown. John Barfield had done the same.

"Ride him any way that suits you," the owner declared, looking Salita over from head to foot. John Barfield opened his mouth to protest, but shut it again at a glance from his mother. He had interfered in Sour Gal's behalf once before, to his own grief.

The men brought an Indian lariat made of braided horse hair. Salita ran it through steady work-hardened fingers, and discarded it, asking for a rawhide rope. Bill Marcy ran to fetch one, while

Luke laid a timid hand on her arm. His face was white with fear, but she spoke a reassuring word to him. He knew there was no swerving her and stepped back.

The rope was to her liking. Dod Tompkins took off his spurs and offered them to her. She shook an undecided head, then adjusted them to her boots. Cruel as they were, she might be obliged to fall back on them.

Nettie Harper was wringing her hands in desperation, and her daughter uttering little affected squeals, in the effort to attract John Barfield's attention, Salita thought, which made her all the more determined to carry on. Mrs. Barfield stood by, stiffly erect, with disapproval written large on her stern countenance, but she offered no protest.

The men were for stopping Salita when they saw that she really intended to mount, but she waved them aside. She fastened a rope about the neck of the sullen horse to hold him and carefully adjusted the hackamore around his bloody foam-flecked muzzle after removing the savage bit, all the time speaking reassuring words to him while the men held him. Around his neck she drew the rawhide rope, fastening it with a double half hitch to the loop that crossed the nose. Her father never used a bit to break a fractious horse. The hackamore gave her power over his head. Quickly she jumped to the saddle while some one fearfully removed the

bandage, and the entire crowd held its breath, expecting to see her thrown.

The horse was surprised and indignant. He braced himself and lowered his head for a mad spell of bucking. The girl "rode 'em straight up," looking to neither the right nor the left. Three or four frantic plunges straight into the air! The crowd was prepared for sunfishing, but he simply made a series of straight jumps as he had with his previous riders, and gave up the fight rather feebly, finally walking sedately down the road, guided by the rein in Salita's sensitive hand. The bucking contest was over for the afternoon. She had conquered a fractious horse with a hackamore in a firm brown hand. She rode slowly back to the blacksmith shop and dismounted before the amazed spectators. The men hurried forward to shake her hand; the women drew away. Such a spectacle was disgraceful, to say the least, their eloquent glances said plainer than words.

"I'll ride him home," Sour Gal said nonchalantly. Dod Tompkins generously offered to lend her his saddle, but she declined, mounting the submissive horse bareback, with the hackamore rein held loosely in her hand. The fifty dollars she placed carelessly in her pocket and rode off without a word. Luke followed with the ox team.

Straight to the trading-post Salita went, dismounting and hitching her horse to the post. She entered and quickly selected a dress length of woolen goods, mounted again and started for home, as if

subduing a fractious Indian pony were an everyday occurrence with her.

She rode slowly ahead of Luke until they came to the pasture bars at home, then waited for him to drive in with the oxen.

"How did you dare, Salita?" the boy asked her admiringly. "No power on earth could have gotten me onto that horse. I was never so frightened in my life."

Salita threw her head back and her merry laugh rang out. "Simpleton!" she said. "What do these Westerners know about a horse? They think they're so all-fired cunning. They let a simple girl outsmart them. Can't any of you use your eyes? That horse had bucked himself clean out before I even thought of mounting him. Do you suppose for a moment I'd risk my neck on a sunfishing horse unless I knew he was completely fagged? I'd die before I'd pull leather or choke the horn before a crowd of men."

Luke gasped in admiration. "Why, you're right." He slapped his thigh with keen relish. "You didn't even take a chance."

"No," Salita grinned impishly, her eyes fairly dancing out of her head. "That's one easy way to earn fifty dollars and a good tough young horse. He's conquered once for all. The fifty dollars meets that note in the spring. I took my own money and bought a dress on the strength of it. I'll make it right

away. Just as well, after all, that I wore these britches. A fractious horse and a side saddle and yards of calico ridingskirt are a bad combination. Modest and all that, though." She laughed again and handed Luke the rein.

XVII

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Nettie Harper turned at once to Mrs. Barfield and the other women as Sour Gal rode the cayuse off in the direction of the trading-post. "We as Christian women should not have stood idly by and let this exhibition go on," she declared emphatically. "We can't have such an example set before our young girls. I am sorry that Julia Margaret witnessed this ungodly spectacle. The young girls in the settlement are modest and unassuming. If I had o' had any idea that Sour Gal was going to ride that horse straddle I certainly would have left."

"You *should* have left at once," Mrs. Barfield reproved her. "I have been patient with that girl. A dress was provided for her, but I saw Wild Flower Ann the other day, and she was wearing it. She's a deliberate wanton, that's what Sour Gal is. The time has come for action. I mean to bring the matter up in the Good Intent Society on Wednesday."

"She'll have to be labored with," Nettie Harper agreed, "and as president of our society you are the one to undertake the task."

Mrs. Barfield demurred at this. "Perhaps it

would be best to have the minister call on her," she hesitated.

"A man would, like as not, take her part. A woman must show her the error of her ways; just lay down the law to her once for all. Julia Margaret would die of shame if she called a man's attention to herself in any way." Mrs. Harper turned approving eyes on her daughter, who blushed at her mother's outspoken approval.

Julia Margaret was homely as a plate of cold greens, so Uncle Sel said, and no man in his senses was likely to give her a second glance, no matter how much she posed and simpered in the presence of the young men. It had before this reached Mrs. Barfield that Uncle Sel had expressed the opinion that Nettie Harper would like to make a match between her daughter and John Barfield, and Mrs. Barfield was not pleased at the implication. No girl in the settlement was good enough for her son. She frowned at the girl and turned from the little knot of women to the wagon that was waiting for her.

John and his father made conversation on the way home, but Mrs. Barfield was silent until they were well out of town.

"Whatever you say about the girl, she has courage," Judge Barfield said admiringly. "I never saw a rider handle a horse better. She's ridden since she was a child, that's evident. It's my opinion that Sour Gal comes of a good family. Misfortune has simply overtaken her on the trail. For my part, I'm

sorry for her, and I don't know as I blame her, like the women do."

"No, of course a *man* wouldn't blame a pretty girl for anything," Mrs. Barfield said sarcastically. "I noticed that both of you put money into the hat when it went around, just to encourage her, and you are not so open-handed when it comes to benevolences, any of you men."

"But, mother," John Barfield protested, "we had no idea that Sour Gal would offer to ride the horse. I would have tried to stop her, but I knew it would do no good. It's dangerous for a woman to attempt to handle a sunfisher."

"No more dangerous than for a man if she wears the proper clothes. If she'd had on a long-riding skirt and insisted on a side saddle as your nice young ladies would have done, there'd have been calico scattered all over Oregon City." The judge laughed at his joke, and John joined him, to his mother's infinite disgust.

"Well," Mrs. Barfield said contemptuously, "something is going to be done about that girl. You have no intention of moving them to the Yamhill country, I see that plainly. And Wild Flower Ann will have to be taken up. She's visiting all over the country, just roaming where she pleases. She's harmless enough, just like a simple child, but there's no telling when she will become dangerous. For my part, I think the authorities have been negligent in the matter of that family."

"Now, mother," John Barfield protested, "you don't understand the situation. They are not indigent. They have bought and paid for their claim, and have never asked for help. Sour Gal is of age. No one has any authority in their affairs so long as they mind their own business. And where could the poor, simple woman go? We have no poor-farm, so her family will have to care for her. We can do nothing until some one complains that she is annoying them; and the women of the settlement have been kind enough to her, like as not encouraged her to visit them in the hope of getting her to tell them something about her family affairs."

"I mean to attend to Sour Gal myself," Mrs. Barfield said as her thin lips closed in an ominous line. "The missionary barrels had children's clothing in them. We will sort out things for the baby and next week I shall take them over to her, and I mean to give her a good straight talk. Some mother in Israel should do her duty, but no one is willing to undertake a disagreeable task. I'll bring her to her senses. Refusing to wear a perfectly good new dress that I made for her with my own hands, and then riding a bucking horse clothes pin fashion before a lot of gaping menfolks."

"Oh, mother, let the girl alone! She's had trouble enough, and she's just as good as any girl in the settlement. She works like a dog, takes care of that family and tries to keep Wild Flower Ann at home. You and Mrs. Harper are the only women who are

so set against her. The rest are charitable and understand how hard her position is." John Barfield looked appealingly at his mother.

"I'll do my Christian duty as I see it without advice from any erring son of mine," she declared. "It's common talk that you are interested in that girl. The disgrace of it is almost more than I can bear."

"I *am* interested in her," John Barfield said hotly, "and if it's in my power I intend to defend her. She needs friends. She's standing almost alone in her struggles. I'm going to do all I can to help her, that is, all she'll allow me to do, and that's the end of it. There's other talk going around the country, too," he added, his anger overcoming his discretion. "They say that I am tied to my mother's apron strings, and right now I'm untying the strings. I'm a man and shall use my own judgment as to right and wrong."

Mrs. Barfield cowered as if he had struck her. He felt miserably that he had. A blow to the spirit is worse to a sensitive soul than lashes on the flesh.

Mrs. Barfield rallied after a moment. "John," she said in the voice of one who forgives and pities the offender, "take your Bible tonight and read the sixth chapter of Ephesians. You remember the one beginning: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayst

live long on the earth.' You are not honoring your parents, but heaping sorrow on them by your behavior."

John had, at the moment, felt pity for his mother, but her quoting Scripture angered him afresh. He had been governed all his life by passages of Scripture.

"I'll just quote the next verse, now that you have called my attention to it," John said heatedly. "I've heard yours many times, but this one is so rarely used that it has passed entirely unnoticed by parents who reserve the right to do all the citing of Scripture: 'And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' I have time and again been provoked to wrath. I sense your entire disapproval of me more when you are silent than when you speak. I'm old enough to sin my own sins now and make my own decisions, even if I have to pay dearly for them. The apron strings, as I said before, are untied from this time on."

His mother drew herself up with dignity. "I'll not descend to vulgar quarreling. Please help me to alight. I'll see at once to supper."

Judge Barfield waited until they entered the barn. "Son," he said uneasily, "do you think it's wise to contrary your mother? We must keep peace in the family. She's been a good mother to you and she means to do right and thinks she does. You

must overlook a lot to get along with a woman. Men go their own ways, but say nothing."

"I'll not be managed by anyone," John declared hotly.

"No man need be, if he will use tact and discretion and keep out of senseless arguments," Judge Barfield told him with a twinkle in his eye. "Silence is the great weapon in dealing with womenfolks. When you are as old and experienced as I am you'll realize this."

"Yes, but I'll not be managed like a little boy any more and be scolded and punished when I know I am not in the wrong," John declared.

"Overlook it all, son. I know it's hard, but if you could see your way to making peace with your mother, I'd be grateful." There was appeal in his father's voice.

John grasped his father's outstretched hand. Thank Heaven, *he* understood and sympathized with him in his dilemma. He could rely on father.

"I'll try, father, but I can't see that innocent girl abused. She meant no harm today. We all admired her courage, even if she was indiscreet in riding a bucking horse before a lot of women who are looking for a chance to slander her. I like Sour Gal and I mean to defend her whenever I can, but I promise not to argue with mother about it."

Supper was eaten in vast silence. After the dishes were cleared away Mrs. Barfield seated herself by the fire with her Bible on her knee, adjusting her

square tortoise-shell glasses and placing the candle where she could see to advantage. John brought a second candle to make her reading easier, and then sat with a book for an uneasy spell before he said good night. He had had difficulty in remaining at home, longing as he did for a glimpse of a red-haired girl with rosy candlelight suffusing a white face as she bent with Luke over his arithmetic.

The Good Intent Society met as usual on Wednesday. Mrs. Barfield brought home a large bundle of clothing, and John knew that the next day she visited Sour Gal, but she did not mention the subject again. If anything, she was grimmer and more taciturn than usual. He gathered that her visit had not been a pleasant one, but remembered his father's advice and forbore asking questions.

Resolutely he kept away from Salita's cabin, though when after his cattle he strained his eyes for a glimpse of her about the dooryard. He called himself all kinds of a fool for taking such an interest in a girl who scarcely knew he existed, who tolerated his presence in her home out of mere politeness because he was Luke's friend.

He bought peppermint candy for the children before Christmas, and took a generous supply of apples from his mother's carefully guarded hoard without her knowledge. Christmas Eve he set off without making any explanation to his father and mother.

Inward qualms filled him as to his reception at the cabin. If he could only know the outcome of his mother's visit to Salita. How glad he was that he knew her name! He always called her that to himself. "Sour Gal" was detestable, and yet she accepted it with seeming indifference.

What would happen when she opened the door for him? He was in an agony of uncertainty, but could not reach the cabin soon enough. Even if she rebuffed him, he would know that the family were all well.

Luke opened the door on a cabin swept and garnished with Oregon grape and pungent fir boughs. Mattie Lou's eager little face glowed red from her activities before the fireplace with an iron pot that gave out the merry thud of corn popping in its cavernous depths.

Sissy was surreptitiously eating the molasses that had been placed in readiness to make popcorn balls. Wild Flower Ann was stringing rose hips. With a childlike anticipation of Christmas she had worked for a week on garlands of salal and creamy snowberries.

Salita sat with little Joe, ready for bed, on her lap. She was on the far side of the fireplace in the shadow. She rose with the baby in her arms and greeted him civilly enough, though he sensed embarrassment in her manner. He stared to the point of rudeness, yet for the life of him could not take his eyes off her. She was demurely clothed. A well-

fitting dress of brown wool relieved at the neck and wrist with a bit of white brought out maidenly curves that had been hitherto unsuspected in her blue shirt and trousers. Her glory of red hair swept in rippling waves off a creamy-white forehead. The grim lines of care and anxiety had somehow been erased from her face; it was a face, ageless in its wisdom, yet indescribably young in its smooth contours. The eyes, two pools of topaz, held serenity in their brown depths.

As she advanced to meet him he thought of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child in her arms, and his spirit knelt in silent adoration to her. He tried to think of some small talk that would relieve the situation, but could only stare like an awkward schoolboy.

"We are just getting ready to hang the stockings," Salita told him. "Come, children, you must go to bed." Wild Flower Ann rose obediently with the others, who were reluctant to leave the fireside. She had fallen completely into childish habits in the last few months. John Barfield noticed that she looked to Salita as a mother, just as the children did.

Asahel looked appealingly at Salita for permission to remain and help fill the clean white stockings that Wild Flower Ann and the children had placed over the mantel. She told him he might stay up, though Luke frowned. Asahel was a younger brother who should take his place with the smaller children.

Salita moved quickly about as soon as quiet reigned in the sleeping-quarters, taking the precious hollow rabbits, dogs, chickens, and fishes, resting each on its bed of violent green sugar grass, from the hiding-place and bringing out some queer animals that she had cut from potatoes for the smaller children. There was a gingerbread man for each. Her eyes danced when John Barfield opened his package and displayed the red apples.

"Just the thing to fill out the toes of the stockings," she exulted. "I was determined to give the children a happy Christmas even if we had no money to spare for gifts. Luke killed two large wild geese yesterday, and Aunt Fat sent over mince pies and vegetables. Such a dinner as we'll have."

They finished by making a kettleful of molasses taffy, joyfully pulling it until it took on the rich creamy yellow shade that was proper for this delectable confection.

John Barfield delighted in every easy, graceful movement of the slender girl in the brown dress, primly relieved with white at the throat and wrist. She was dainty just like her mother, a delicate girl who should have been sheltered from the world. For the first time his seething thoughts took shape. He acknowledged to himself a wild desire that amounted almost to madness to stand between her and the hardships that she was enduring daily. There was no longer any doubt in his mind about his feeling for Salita Prentiss. He loved her, had loved her from

the moment that he first saw her surrounded by the misery and squalor of an immigrant family just arrived in Oregon.

No wonder that his mother's unrelenting attitude had angered him, and still he hadn't exactly known his own mind. He had told himself that his fight at the cabin-raising was just his involuntary defense of a woman in distress, but now he knew better—he had all the time been defending a girl he loved.

The evening wore on all too swiftly. At length the taffy lay in luscious pale yellow cubes on a platter, flanked by a large pan holding obese popcorn balls. The stage was all set for Christmas morning. John took out his silver watch. "Merry Christmas," he greeted them. "It's five minutes after twelve. I must be going."

Salita rose to open the door for him, making a barely perceptible motion for the boys to remain indoors as she followed him into the darkness.

"I couldn't bear to spoil Christmas Eve," she said slowly in a voice like a little girl who had a very hard duty before her, "but I must speak to you alone."

"Yes?" John Barfield said apprehensively.

"Mr. Barfield," the girl gathered courage to go on, "your mother visited me day before yesterday. You know she does not approve of my conduct." It was desperately hard for Salita to make her meaning clear. Her voice caught. "Your mother resents your visiting here. She thinks that you are com-

promising me and ruining your prospects. You see, there has been a lot of talk about me."

"But no one believes that yarn that Nettie Harper spun out of nothing," John Barfield declared in indignation. "Mother knows that there is not a word of truth in that vile gossip, even though she will not say a word one way or the other."

"I came into the settlement under unfortunate circumstances, and there is a stain on my honor! No matter if I am innocent, the smirch remains. Luke has written his uncle in the States. He will come to care for his sister and her family next fall, we are sure. I shall do my best until he takes the responsibility, and then I am going home, where my family is respected. From now on my name must not be coupled with yours in any way. Do you understand?"

"But Miss Prentiss," John Barfield protested, "you need your friends. I'm not worrying about my chances or your injuring me in any way. I'll speak to my mother about this." He was hurt and angry.

"Your mother is right according to her lights," Salita went on tonelessly. "She took me to task for riding that horse before a vulgar crowd of men, as she called them. I see where she could blame me. It was a rash, indiscreet thing to do. I'll admit I forgot myself. The horse interested me. I can't remember when I learned to ride. My father raised fine horses in the States. And then, when Bill Marcy held up that fifty dollars and Dod—what's his

name?—offered the horse besides, I couldn't resist the opportunity to win that money to pay off the note that you and Uncle Sel indorsed. I'd do it again," she said fiercely. "I can't add anything to my disgrace, and now we'll not be under obligations to anyone. The claim will be paid for and no one will have the right to interfere with us until some one comes for the family." She rushed on as if she were husbanding her forces to finish a matter that it was almost unbearable to discuss.

Her words, gentle as they were, stung John Barfield. For a moment he was speechless and Salita turned to go. A groping hand sought hers and clasped it firmly in the darkness.

"I understand, but that makes me care all the more. I can still be your friend. When you need me, please call, and I'll come. You may need help sorely, and I think you know how it is with me, though I have never told you."

"Yes," Salita gasped, and wrenching her hand free ran into the cabin and shut the door firmly behind her. She listened a moment, thankful that the boys had gone to bed. When she heard the sound of his pony's hoofs, she knew that she had sent him out of her life. Her face gray and drawn with her agony, she made her uncertain way to the table and sat with her head on her outspread arms until the fire died and the December chill crept into her bones. If tears soaked her pillow, no one knew it. Her morn-

ing face was serene as she woke the happy children with "Merry Christmas."

John Barfield rode home under the weight of his first real sorrow, and yet a peculiar sorrow that he hoped would in time turn to joy. He had in a measure declared himself to Salita Prentiss, and she had very gently dismissed him and his mother was to blame for the whole thing. He raged at the thought, then dismissed it as another entered his mind. Salita Prentiss cared for him—her little work-worn hand had lain in his and he knew, just as she knew, how matters stood between them. Even though they never spoke to each other again, they would have this to remember all their lives.

He must be content for a while, but win that girl he would, no matter what his mother said. If she returned to the States he would follow her, but in the mean time he would plan and wait, though how he was going to live without seeing her occasionally he could not make out.

XVIII

UNCLE SEL IS INDISPOSED

The winter of 1848-49 was unusually mild. Rain fell in torrents, but it was a warm, gentle precipitation that did not keep Luke indoors much of the time. The first day of February there was a fall of soft wet snow that lay on the ground a few days and then melted in the face of a warm Chinook wind driving rain before it. Salita and Luke were a bit uneasy when they saw snow falling in great feathery flakes. They had no way of providing shelter for their cattle and no hay or grain to feed them if the cold weather should be protracted so that the snow-covered pasture prevented their grazing. But the Chinook was just the forerunner of spring, so Uncle Sel told them, cocking a weather-wise eye at the soft gray clouds moving rapidly across the sky.

Uncle Sel had persistently changed work with Luke, taking as much interest in their farm as he did in his own. The boy was an apt pupil, strong and willing to work. They had cut and split rails all winter, besides riving enough shakes to roof the barn. They hoped to enlarge the old stable before spring work began. Already most of the timbers were drawn from the woods in readiness for its erection.

"Come fall ye'll be erbout ez well fixed ez any o' the settlers. I calculate ye done well this winter, Luke. Heaps o' families 'ith able-bodied men folks hain't no furder erlong 'n ye be. Lots o' these here settlers think they done ernough when they crossed the plains, an' hain't done much more'n raised a leetle garden sass an' argue on politics an' religion sence they got settled," Uncle Sel scoffed.

"We'll do well this summer," Luke prophesied. "We'll reap a harvest selling farm produce to the Californians. We mean to raise all we can. Every one of us will work at the crops."

"Ye got right smart o' cattle, too," Uncle Sel exulted. "Thet old ox pulled through the winter right good. Come spring ye can sell him, er swap him off, ter advantage." He had advised Luke to keep the ox in the barn with the milk cow and had allowed him to work for hay to piece out the ration, so as to fatten him and to keep their cow up to her milk. "Hit's managin' that makes a farmer. Ye need bone labor to work the sile, but ef yer head ain't a workin', too, ye don't git anywheres."

The cattle were a source of great satisfaction to Luke and Salita. The cow was failing rapidly in her milk—would soon be dry. They hoped to trade her and the old ox for a good fresh cow as soon as spring opened. Their young stock were thriving. The two steers were already fat and lusty, and the heifer would calf in May. The yoke of young oxen had worked by spells through the winter, but they were

in fair condition. Oregon grass even in winter is abundant and rich in sustaining qualities. The ox team would carry on the farm work. Their prospects were rosy indeed.

The horse Salita had won at such a cost to herself was gentle and tractable. They called him Sundown. Luke rode him proudly to Oregon City to attend to the marketing, or rounded up his own and Uncle Sel's stray cattle.

February passed and March came in like a lion to go out like a lamb. Spring was over the gentle land. They were handicapped for farm implements, having to change off with Uncle Sel until Salita bought a plowshare for twenty dollars which the old man took delight in stocking for her, declaring that he planned to borrow it, as he thought it was better than his own.

Early in the winter Luke had taken his mother to Doctor Histler for medical treatment, but had received little encouragement. "Can't do a thing for her," the old man had declared. "She's strong and well now—don't need pills. She may come to her senses some day suddenly, but then again she may grow simpler." She obeyed Salita like a child, though her habit of running away was firmly fixed. In spite of their constant vigilance she escaped them, often spending the night at the Indian village or in the cabin of some settler ten miles away. The neighbors were kindness itself in looking out for her, often

bringing her home and sympathizing with Salita and Luke in their efforts to confine her.

School closed in March and the children spent their time in helping about the cabin and in putting in the garden. Mattie Lou could carry on the housework like a little woman, cooking the simple meals and minding the smaller children and the baby so that Salita was free to help with the farm work. Asahel did nearly as much work as Luke. The three of them performed heroic labors in finishing their fencing and plowing the rich black virgin soil. They hoped to raise enough wheat for their winter's bread, and then to put the remainder of the plot into potatoes that would bring top prices at shipping-time in the fall.

They were as well off now as many of the settlers who had been in the country two or three years. Many of the women were working their claims as best they could with the help of half-grown boys while the men of the family feverishly hunted gold in California.

Aunt Fat had promised Salita four brooding hens and eggs for setting for work she had done for her earlier in the winter. One blustery March morning she decided to go for them. She would help Aunt Fat all day making soap on shares. Mattie Lou could mind the children at home. She would take Wild Flower Ann with her, as she always seized the opportunity to escape when left with the children, and Salita never quite overcame her uneasiness for

baby Joe's safety if he were left alone with his mother, though for months she had not paid the slightest attention to him.

Aunt Fat was all bustle and stir when Salita reached her cabin. She was behind with her soap-making. The hollow log under the leach by the door was full to running over with strong lye from the hardwood ashes. The grease for the soap was heating in a huge kettle in the smokehouse.

"By rights this here job should 'a' bin done late last fall, but somehow I hain't so peart as onct I wuz," the thin little old lady complained as she set Salita to straining the fat while she measured out the lye and prepared the large barrel that was to hold the molasses-like mixture.

Every housewife takes a just pride in the quality of her soap: if too much lye enters into its composition it will take the skin off the hands; if not enough, it makes no lather. Aunt Fat was carefully testing the lye kettle with a feather; the solution would take the flues off if it were the proper strength. "Law sakes alive!" she exclaimed as she peered with nearsighted eyes out the door. "Ef here don't come Uncle Seldom, a-walkin' like he cain't scurcely hold hisself together!" She ran down the path to meet him and supported him into the house, the old man groaning and protesting at every step.

"Ketched me short when I stooped up frum saltin' the cattle," he gasped as Aunt Fat eased him into his split-bottomed chair by the fire.

"I tole ye not ter take off them heavy red flannels yistiday. Jist cause the sun comes out from behin' a cloud tain't summer. Ye allus wuz headstrong, Sel Purdy, a-gettin' all het up a workin' an' then settin' down in the shade ter cool off. I cain't l'arn ye nothin'." She was getting out the huge camphor bottle. "Here, smell o' this camphire whilst I'm gettin' out my simples," she admonished. "Sour Gal, ye mind the soap, an' don't let hit spile while I tend ter Pa."

She helped the loudly protesting old man out of his clothes and into bed, fastening his red-flannel nightcap firmly under his chin, setting boneset to brew while she mixed goose grease with turpentine and heated it.

Uncle Sel, between his groans, watched her with a fascinated eye.

"Sufferin' snakes, Ma, ye hain't a-goin to insult my innards 'ith thet devil's broth," he protested, then subsided with a loud groan as the misery caught him.

"I be, an' yer a-goin' ter take hit peaceful like, er my name hain't Marthie Purdy. Stormin'll only make the misery in yer back worser," she warned him, helping him to turn over so that she might anoint him thoroughly with the goose grease and turpentine.

"No need fer ter kill me," Uncle Sel yelled in protest.

"Ye leave be," she warned sternly. "Ye oughter

be glad ter have kind hands ter rub hot grease onter ye." Her movements were gentle in spite of the seeming sharpness of her tongue. Uncle Sel was hard to manage when a rare attack of lumbago overtook him.

"No use ter cozen me, Ma," the old man said plaintively when the hot fomentation had eased the pain somewhat and he noticed that Aunt Fat was measuring out a large cup of the loathsome infusion of boneset. "Thisahere's my last sickness. Ye're ez good's a widdy this minute. I want ye should send fer John Barfield. I aim ter get my will drawed up whilst I'm sensible."

"Poo, Pa! Ye allus think ye're on yer death-bed the first pain thet strikes ye. Here drink this afore hit cools." She pressed the nauseous dose to his lips. In vain he turned away. Aunt Fat meant to be obeyed, and was, at last. The ordeal over, Uncle Sel lay with eyes closed, moaning feebly.

"Ef I wuzn't sick nigh to death afore I swallered that vile potion, I sure am a-dyin' now," he reproved her. "Blow the horn fer Luke. He's in the far field. I want he should go fer John. This here will cain't wait. I may be dead now afore he gits here. The misery wuz in my back fust, but thet thar boneset's sent news ter my stommick."

"Now, Pa," Aunt Fat reassured him, putting a cold compress on his forehead, "ye mind ye're allus like this when ye git a spell o' lumbago."

"Oh, argue 'ith a dyin' man!" His anger strength-

ened him in his determination. "Ye're safe enough from sickness, Marthie Purdy. Ye'll never die 'lessen a bone disease comes erlong."

Aunt Fat, with her back to him, smiled to herself. Her thinness was a constant source of merriment to Uncle Sel. He wasn't seriously ill, she knew. Very sick men lay still and did not bicker. She had pulled her husband through too many spells of indisposition to be worried.

"Be ye a'goin' ter send fer John?" Uncle Sel inquired again. "Hain't my wishes ter be respected on my death-bed?"

"Yes, Pa, I'm a-goin' this minute." She called Sour Gal and told her to blow the horn for Luke, and, if he did not answer, to go to the field after him and she would keep an eye on the soap.

Luke answered the horn readily enough, and Aunt Fat made no further protest when Uncle Sel sent him for John Barfield.

"A man allus thinks he air a-goin' ter die the minit a sickness ketches him, though I ain't a-chargin' thet rheumatiz ain't mighty painful," Aunt Fat smiled to Salita when they were out of hearing in the smokehouse. "Men air the beatenest fer being took sudden-like when their womenfolk gits a b'ilin' o' soap a-goin'. Hit's a good job that ye came over this mornin' er I'd 'a' sp'iled all thet good grease."

Salita shrank from meeting John Barfield, though she longed for the sight of him. He had not been to their cabin since Christmas Eve, but Luke told

her that he often stopped to talk to him when he was in the timber at work. She thought at first that she would make some excuse for going home, but it would not be right to leave Aunt Fat with a sick man on her hands and a mountain of work to do. She would remain and, if possible, keep out of sight in the smokehouse until he left.

Aunt Fat asked her to come in and help with dinner, and they were just putting the meal on the table when John Barfield rode up with Luke. Uncle Sel had slept and was feeling relieved. He shook John's outstretched hand feebly. There was nothing to do but shake hands all around. Salita's hand trembled in his firm clasp in spite of her efforts at self-control; she felt herself blushing scarlet and was sure that Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat noticed her confusion.

After dinner she went immediately to the smokehouse to finish off the soap, and John remained by the bedside of the sick man, who, now that he was easier, decided that he would not make his will, after all. He had much rather spend the time in visiting.

Toward the middle of the afternoon John came out of the cabin. Aunt Fat's manipulation with goose grease and turpentine being in the way of a delicate hint that it was time for his visit to end.

He looked about casually. The smokehouse door stood invitingly open. It would just be common politeness to step inside and speak to Salita before he unhitched his horse to go home. The girl raised a flushed face to his as he darkened the low doorway.

"Salita, er—Miss Prentiss," the young man faltered, conscious that in his eagerness his tongue had slipped on her name. "You don't mind if I speak to you here at Uncle Sel's, do you? God knows how hard it has been to keep away all these months." There was a yearning in his voice that echoed in the heart of a very lonely girl. Tears sprang to her eyes to shame her. She turned quickly to hide them, brushing angrily at her eyes with the back of her wet hand.

In a great stride John Barfield reached her, and seizing her by the shoulders turned her about so that she was forced to face him, though she tried to look away, her heart nearly bursting in her breast. "No use to pretend we don't care, Salita," he said gently, cupping her chin in the palm of his warm hand and compelling her eyes to answer the question in his. What he saw there exulted him. His arms closed tightly around her before she could protest and his lips had found hers.

"You know how things stand," she reproached him. "You must not. You're only courting trouble for yourself." She wrenched herself free from his arms and stood confronting him reproachfully. "Don't make my lot harder," she pleaded between great sobs. "We must not see each other again. No one must ever know."

"We'll be married tomorrow," John Barfield cried eagerly. "There's no use in waiting until things clear up. If you were my wife no one would dare say a word against you. You need me, Salita, as much as

I need you, though your foolish pride won't let you acknowledge it."

But there was finality in Salita's eyes as she turned their clear frank gaze upon him, her composure completely recovered. "That can never be," she said slowly, like one who hesitates to turn the knife in a wound. She held out a hand in dismissal and John Barfield grasped it, then turned hurriedly and mounted his waiting horse.

"Somethin' wrong atween Sour Gal and John, hain't there?" Uncle Sel inquired of Aunt Fat when they were alone in the cabin. His recovery had been amazing for one who had declared himself at death's door but a few hours before. "I reckon Sour Gal's gave him the mitten. Thet young feller, me lad, looks like he's jist had a spell o' fever? Ye mind he couldn't take his eyes off thet gal."

"Addin' match-makin' ter yer long list o' sins, be ye?" the little old lady took him to task sharply, peering at him out of her black birdlike eyes. "Cain't ye keep from interferin' in Sour Gal's bizness?"

"Who's interferin'?" Uncle Sel asked indignantly. "Cain't a sick man express a honest opinion 'ithout gittin' his head took plumb off?"

Aunt Fat looked at him severely over the rims of her glasses. "An' I cain't swear on the Bible thet ye're ez sick ez ye allow. Looks ter me thet thet's jist a dodge o' yourn to git them young folks together. Ye forgot all about havin' yer will drawed up when John came."

"Now come, Ma," Uncle Sel urged. "I had a awful crick in my back, but it's done eased up now. Where's the harm in young John spendin' o' a few hours a-settin' with the sick?"

At a slight noise outside he jumped out of bed, brave in his flannel underwear and nightcap. "Ef there hain't John a-ridin' off right now, I reckon he got a little courtin' done while ye was a dousin' me 'ith thet goose grease."

"Take shame to yerself, Seldom Purdy, fer a-practicin' sech deceit onter me when I got a b'ilin' o' soap like ter spile," Aunt Fat scolded, then smiled to herself as she joined her husband at the window.

"Ma, hit's wuth takin' a dose o' boneset tea ter give them two young folks a chanct ter visit a spell 'ithout the hull settlement a-knowin' hit." He slapped his red flannel sides joyfully and asked for his clothes.

"Honest, Ma, I had a terrible crick in my back," the old man sought to justify himself, "but yer boneset an' goose grease hez plumb cured hit."

Aunt Fat sniffed indignantly, though her eyes sparkled and a tender musing smile played about her lips.

"I know, Pa," she said, "we love Sour Gal like she wuz our own datter."

XIX

SALITA AND LUKE TAKE A BAD RISK

April was a busy month on the claim. Salita worked with the boys from the first streaks of light until it was too dark to see, leaving the housework and the care of the children on Mattie Lou's capable shoulders. An ample kitchen garden was planted in the bottomland along the little stream. Soon straight rows of carrots and beets showed thin lines of green and bronze. Sissy and Lemuel, small as they were, helped with the weeding, toiling down the long rows with old kitchen forks to loosen the soil about the seedlings.

The four hens each brought off a brood of chickens, that the children tended, with great joy in the task. Aunt Fat had given Mattie Lou an old gray goose and gander and a pair of ducks with eggs for setting. Poultry is the first thing to which the settler turns his attention. Properly managed, they contribute a goodly share of food for the table, and the eggs help to buy the staple groceries. Luke had taken a brood sow in payment for his work for Uncle Sel. When she farrowed they would have a good start of swine. Perhaps by trading they could have hogs to fatten for the fall butchering. The winter's

meat was a problem. They hoped that their uncle would reach them by late autumn and take the responsibility of the family, but Salita told Luke that they must plan just as if they had to depend upon their own resources. So far there had been no answer to Luke's letter, but they felt they could expect news most any day now, though the mails were slow and uncertain.

The cow was almost dry. Uncle Sel thought they had best drive her and the old ox over to French Prairie, where the Hudson's Bay Company employees had established farms when their terms of service were over. This was ten or fifteen years before, and the farmers in that region were prosperous. They could surely make some sort of a trade. Aunt Fat promised them milk enough for baby Joe and Buddy until their heifer freshened or they succeeded in securing another.

Luke borrowed John Barfield's saddle horse for the day, and Salita, wearing her brown dress, set off on Sundown, riding primly sideways with a blanket and surcingle. The day was warm, all bright blue overhead and vivid green underfoot, with myriads of insects humming in the sweet spring air and the pink of the wild currants and the soft yellow of the Oregon grape burgeoning the smiling hillsides. Delicate ferns lifted their tightly folded fronds in the glens as they drove the cattle through. This was a rare holiday for the two whose backs had bent all winter to heavy tasks.

"I'm not worrying if Uncle Riley Chatham never comes to help us out," Luke confided to Salita as they ate their early luncheon by a little rill that crossed the shady road they were traveling. "Depending on your relations ain't so good, anyway; father always said so. We'll manage just as well, maybe better, without any help. Like as not Uncle Riley would separate the children, and I know father would have wanted us brought up together. I worried terribly last winter, but that's over now. The going will be easier from this time on, with plenty to eat and enough to wear and cattle increasing every year."

"Yes," Salita agreed absently, "But I may not want to stay with you always. You know I have been slandered here, and a woman cannot live her life out under a cloud. I plan to go back to Kentucky and be an old-maid school-teacher, as soon as Uncle Riley Chatham takes you children off my hands."

This was news to Luke. He turned a dismayed face to her. "Why, you are like my older sister! I never dreamed you'd leave us."

Salita was instantly sorry she had spoken. "We'll leave that for another time," she said. "If we are to get across the ferry we'd best hurry on."

Broad grain-fields stretched over the rolling hills across the Willamette. It was worth the fifty cents the ferryman charged for taking them across just to see the well-settled country on the west side of the

river. They stopped at a blacksmith shop and inquired for a trade in cattle, and were directed up the road a mile where a French Canadian had over fifty head in his pasture. He glanced skeptically at the ox and the cow, but finally showed them an old cow with a young calf by her side.

She would not be much of a milker, Luke was sure, but the heifer calf would in time grow into a cow. After considerable dickering they made the trade, the Indian wife of the farmer throwing in three geese to even things a bit, and they rode slowly home, fairly well pleased with their bargain. By May their young heifer would be fresh. With two cows they could manage. Luke thought they had better trade the ox team for young cows. He would break the steers for their own use as soon as possible. They must increase their breeding stock. In a few years calves grew into money, while an ox was always an ox, valuable when he was young, worthless as old age overtook him.

"You have a good head on your shoulders, Luke. You'll be rich some day if you learn to trade," Salita told him. "Keeping stock moving by weeding out the old and improving the herd is the secret of cattle-raising."

They planned happily as they rode home. They would feed the calf on middlings from the grist mill mixed with all the skim milk that could possibly be spared. Many a good calf had been reared by that method. Later when they had plenty of milk they

would buy up calves; they were always cheap, as no one wanted to bother to raise them by hand.

The next day Luke rode into Oregon City for beans and rice. They were almost out of these necessary commodities. Uncle Riley Chatham's letter was in the post-office. He was emigrating early in the spring with his family, and hoped to be with them in the fall.

Luke was pleased as he read the letter to Salita. "He'll find us well off when he comes," the boy boasted. "I wouldn't have a care in the world now, if it weren't for mother. I don't think there is any hope for her. Seems to me she's growing worse instead of better, though perhaps when she sees Uncle Riley and Aunt Samantha she'll remember."

"Let's hope she will, Luke," Salita said comfortingly, though she had no hope herself. Better she had died on the trail like her own dear mother, than drag out a long, hopeless life with a blank mind, she often thought. Wild Flower Ann was their ever-present sorrow.

But no sorrow can bow down the young for long. They were happy that spring. The stress of keeping up the larder was over. Their little cow had a heifer calf, as they had hoped, and she proved to be a good milker. By the first of June the garden was yielding young beet and turnip tops for greens and an abundance of lettuce and radishes and tender seed onions that they thinned from the rows that were to furnish them large dry onions for winter.

The beans were thriving and in a week or two they would have carrots. The peas were filling out to plump pods. Never a garden grew better than theirs in the black loam that worked up like ashes under the constant hoeing. That truck patch meant plenty the next winter.

They planned to salt a whole barrel of cucumbers for pickles and have loads of cabbage and turnips and squashes and pumpkins. The three acres of potatoes would bring in money in the fall. They had been in Oregon little better than six months and already they were on the road to prosperity.

One hot June day Salita and Luke were hoeing potatoes when Asahel came running from Uncle Sel's in all haste to impart news. "I seen Hank."

"Saw Hank," Salita corrected, not gaining his import.

"Yes, but it was that Hank that you threw the sour dough on," he panted, impatient at the correction. "He never seen me, though, I hid in the thicket until they went past. Those men were with him." He waited for the information to sink in properly before he told the most important part of his story.

Salita and Luke prompted him impatiently, but he was not to be hurried.

"Hank was riding your little mare, I'd know Garnet in the dark. They were driving a band of horses down toward Hardscrabble. They had yours in the band, Salita. I know yours were there," he went on defiantly, expecting to be contradicted. "That pair

of roan geldings and the chestnut sorrel that your father used to ride were in that bunch, sure as you're alive."

"Are you sure 'twas Hank?" Luke was always a bit uncertain about his younger brother's statements. "There's nothing strange in a band of horses on the way to California. How could Hank and that lot of horse thieves get over the mountains this time of the year? They must have wintered in the foothills west of the Cascades."

"Did you hear anything they said?" Salita asked.

"Yes, I was just going to tell you, but Luke always thinks I don't know anything because I'm two years younger than he is. They said something about Nick Ridgely and laughed. I'll bet they stop at Ridgely's tonight."

Luke was all interest. "Like's not those Ridgely boys are right in with them in horse-stealing. They bear a bad name in the settlement, anyway."

"Do you suppose we could send the sheriff after those horses?" Salita asked Luke. A wild hope raised itself in her mind. If she could only recover her horses she would ask nothing better of fortune.

Luke thought a moment before he spoke. "Don't you think we'd best capture them and then call the sheriff? We'd feel kind of silly if they weren't your horses, after all."

"They might get clear out of the country before he could overtake them, too." Salita was thinking hard. "We could ride down tonight and see if they

are mine. If they are we'll simply take them. It's not stealing to take what belongs to you away from thieves. We'll risk it, anyway."

"Don't you say a word to anyone, not even the children," Luke warned Asahel sharply. "I'll go right over and ask John Barfield to lend me his saddle horse. Just tell him we want to round up some stock if he asks me."

Salita agreed, though not without misgivings. Horse-stealing was a very serious crime in a new country, but she was sure she could prove her property, and possession was nine points of the law.

Luke could scarcely wait for darkness before setting out. "There's a cabin in the timber that the settler's call 'The Orphan's Home.' I've heard the men laugh about it. They say cattle and horse thieves drive stock in there and brand them. John Barfield showed it to me one day when we were looking for his strays. It's about two miles this side of Ridgely's and off to the left. Nobody lives there. If they've stolen those horses, that's where they'll hide them. They don't even have to stand guard at night —just turn them loose in the pasture. Easy as frog pie to take them, if they're hidden there."

Salita put on her old boots, shirt, and pantaloons, smiling a little to herself as she loaded her gun and strapped it in her belt. She had been wearing dresses lately. The outfit looked strange, but she could get about easier, and the gun she must have. They were taking a dangerous risk, of that she was certain, but

they must chance it. They would not leave a stone unturned to regain those horses.

The adventure proved tame enough. They came up to the lonely cabin very cautiously. It was deserted. Just as cautiously they moved on to the well-fenced pasture lot. No one about! Luke crept forward to be sure. They heard horses, though, and decided to wait for the moon to rise before they examined them closely.

Salita gave a little hushed cry of joy as they went into the pasture. The roan geldings were there just as Asahel had said, and her father's great chestnut sorrel stood a little apart. Nine head of hers she recognized. She had them all but Garnet now. Hank was riding her; likely she was stabled at Ridgely's. They would cut her horses out of the bunch and send the sheriff after Garnet in the morning.

Expertly they rounded up the horses and, scarcely making a sound, drove them the five miles home. "I can prove our brand," Salita said. "There'll be no trouble in this. Lucky thing we found them. They'd have been out of the country by tomorrow."

They drove their horses down into the south pasture out of sight of the road and were in bed and sound asleep before morning.

XX

THE SHERIFF CALLS ON SALITA

John Barfield had but little appetite for breakfast. Lately he had developed a stubborn insomnia born of the anxiety that lay like a leaden weight on his mind. Night after night he had wrestled with his problem. He had not seen Salita since the memorable afternoon in Uncle Sel's smokehouse. His dismissal had been final, he felt; no use in forcing unwelcome attentions on the already overburdened girl, and yet he blamed her for her stubbornness. Pride was well enough, but there was no reason that he could see for allowing it to ruin two lives.

Last night he had tried in vain to read by the light of the two candles in the sitting-room, but toward nine o'clock had abandoned the attempt and set off to walk in the scented stillness of the June night. He did not come in until nearly morning. His mother, lately, had paid no attention to his vagaries, had not even roused when he entered the house.

Breakfast proceeded in silence. Judge Barfield ate hurriedly, anxious to escape to his work about the farm. The house was merely a place for eating and sleeping, these days. The Indian serving-woman,

Sally, moved quietly about, attending to their wants, as if she, too, felt the strain. John pushed back his almost untasted breakfast and made a move to rise when there was a tap at the kitchen door, made by the butt of a riding-whip.

Mrs. Barfield looked up in annoyance. She resented intrusion in her kitchen. Callers should come to the front entrance and be received properly in the sitting-room. Judge Barfield opened the door on Joe Meek, who came in without waiting for an invitation. Joe Meek had but recently returned from Washington, where he had received the appointment of United States marshal for the newly organized Oregon Territory. General Joe Lane, the territorial Governor, had arrived with him. Oregon was at last a duly organized territory under the government of the United States.

Joe Meek had acted as sheriff since the Provisional Government was established in 1843. Now he was invested with a new dignity, but this, in Mrs. Barfield's opinion, did not give him the right to enter her kitchen. She had never approved of Joe Meek. He was a "mountain man" who had been in the Oregon country for years. She considered him uncouth in his manner and slovenly in his dress. In her opinion the post of United States marshal for Oregon should have gone to a man who would lend dignity to the office.

The situation was awkward. Joe Meek looked about a bit uneasily, standing first on one foot and

then the other until Mrs. Barfield came to his rescue. "Sally, show Mr. Meek into the sitting-room," she said with outraged dignity, following in the wake of John and her husband. Still the marshal hesitated in stating his business.

"Mother, perhaps you had best leave us alone," Judge Barfield admonished her gently. She turned into the kitchen again, closing the door. As she passed the window she noticed four men sitting idly on their horses in the kitchen dooryard. Three were strangers to her, but she recognized Nick Ridgely and felt a vague alarm. Nick Ridgely was not a welcome visitor at the Barfields' at any time and he knew it. What could bring him here with the marshal so early in the morning? She sat down weakly in a chair and waited.

Joe Meek turned quickly to John Barfield as soon as the door closed upon his mother. "Where were you last night, young man?" His voice was stern.

John Barfield started angrily. Was he being spied upon? Who could have an interest in his wandering at night. "Why—er—I was walking," he said at last.

"Rather you wuz riding," Joe Meek corrected him unpleasantly. "I have come to arrest you in the name of the law fer hoss-stealing. The complaining witnesses are waiting outside. They charge that in company with a female, called Sour Gal in these parts, you drove off nine head of hosses that belong to them.

They claim that they are corralled now in this young woman's south pasture."

John's face snowed his consternation. He was about to speak, then thought better of it and turned to his father.

"There has been some mistake," Judge Barfield said in bewilderment. "My son has no reason to steal horses."

Mrs. Barfield, her anxiety getting the upper hand, entered the room just in time to hear the last sentence. Her face paled.

"Your son was out last night, Misses Barfield," Joe Meek said in answer to her inquiring glance.

"You may rest assured my son was not engaged in horse-stealing. I see Nick Ridgely in the door-yard. This is a false charge of his. He entertains ill-feeling toward my son," Mrs. Barfield exclaimed indignantly.

"Allow me to take you to your room, Mother," Judge Barfield said firmly. "I regret that you overheard our conversation. This is not a matter to discuss before ladies." He turned reproachfully to the officer.

"I am bound under the law to do my duty," Joe Meek said, his anger rising. "Come with me, young man. The law is no respecter of persons."

John Barfield followed him outside, while his father turned to reassure his mother. Nick Ridgely dismounted from his horse, his triumph very evident as he confronted the dismayed John. "I ketched ye

this time," he leered. "Ye think ye're so all-powerful smart. Fight a man fer makin' a remark about Sour Gal an' then spend a night helpin' her round up hosses. There hain't much kin be done with a gal who steals hosses, but men has been known ter hang fer layin' hands on sich proputty."

"We'll go over to Sour Gal's place and see about this," Joe Meek told them, a bit pompous in his authority. "Hoss-stealin' air a right serious matter. Git out a hoss."

"I'll go afoot." The young man started a little. No use admitting that his horse had been loaned. This was clearly a piece of deviltry concocted by Nick Ridgely to even up an old score with him. He had shamed him the day of the cabin-raising, and Nick was retaliating after the manner of his kind. His only thought as he walked along beside the men was how he could best shield Salita. He would wait for developments before he made a statement.

Salita and Luke had slept a full hour after sunup, a rare indiscretion at this time of the year when farm work was so pressing. The family were also at breakfast when the men rode up to the open door. There was hesitation in the marshal's manner as Luke bade them enter. Salita looked up inquiringly.

"I'm Joe Meek, United States marshal for the Oregon Territory, an' my visit this mornin' hain't jist to my likin'. I have come ter arrest ye. Ye be Sour Gal, hain't ye? Ye're charged with hoss-stealin'."

"I was coming in to see you the first thing this morning," Salita never so much as flickered an eyelash. "It isn't stealing to take horses that belong to you, is it?" she asked steadily. "There were ten horses in my band. I have recovered all but the one this Hank is riding. I meant to lay the charge of stealing against him, so that I can recover my little mare, Garnet."

In vain John Barfield signaled with his eyes. She paid not the slightest heed to him.

"Ye and John Barfield air in mighty low business a-night-ridin' after hosses," Nick Ridgely charged her maliciously. "That air story won't hold water. Ye hain't told airy soul that ye ever owned hosses."

"John Barfield had nothing whatsoever to do with recovering my horses," Salita said angrily, ignoring his other charge.

"Naw, he didn't," Nick taunted. "Ye thought no one seed ye, but we was a-lying in the bushes all the time. I'd know that sorrel hoss he rides on the darkest night. A fine gal ye be with yer uppity manners. We ketched ye both, an' we'll have the law on ye."

Hank and his companions laughed aloud in their satisfaction, slapping Nick jovially on the back.

Joe Meek frowned at their banter, regarding the men doubtfully from under bushy black eyebrows. His beady eyes snapped. "Ye'd best mind yer manners," he warned them gruffly. "Ye don't bear none too good a name, hereabouts, Nick Ridgely. Chargin' a woman with hoss-stealin' air one thing,

but insultin' her air another. We hain't never lodged no woman in jail here, an' hit'll be hard ter do. If she can prove her property, ye're the boys thet'll see the inside o' our new jail."

"I am prepared to prove my property," Salita told him, "They are branded on the left flank with a lazy P." She stepped up to Garnet and turned her about to examine the brand. They all gathered in a knot about the little mare. Salita turned angrily to Hank after she had stood a moment in astonished silence. "Altered my brand, didn't you?" she flung at him. "Did it rather clumsily, too, used a ring off the saddle." The brand that should have been a lazy P was now a lazy B.

"Round up the nine head of horses in the south pasture," Salita commanded Luke. "Take Sundown and hurry."

Luke went to the stable at once, while the others waited. John Barfield cast despairing eyes at Salita, but she did not so much as glance his way. Judge Barfield rode up in the meantime and joined the group. John drew a calm strength from his father's presence.

The horses came up, with Luke swinging an expert lariat in their wake. He threw the noose over the head of one of the roan geldings and brought him forward for inspection. The brand was a lazy B. One by one they examined the left flanks of the nine. All bore the same mark.

Nick Ridgely and Hank looked at one another

triumphantly. Proving the girl's story was not going to be so easy. "Jist explain ter the marshal how yer hoss comes ter be in Sour Gal's stable, will ye?" Nick turned to John Barfield.

"Luke borrowed that horse yesterday," Salita told Joe Meek. "Luke and I rounded up those horses last night. John Barfield knows nothing of this affair."

Wild Flower Ann had joined them unnoticed. She gazed at the men with a child's interest, dropped the daisy chain she had been carefully braiding, and made her way to Hank with sudden recognition in her eyes. "I remember you," she said to him, placing her hands on his shoulders and peering into his face. "Salita threw sour dough on you, and you stole Sissy, when we were at Emigrant Springs. I don't care if you did take Salita's horses, but you were a bad man to steal a little girl and leave her way out on the road. She would have died if the Indians hadn't found her."

With an oath Hank tried to throw off her clinging hands. She only gripped him tighter. "You'll be punished for stealing Sissy," Wild Flower Ann fairly screamed at him, shaking him in a frenzy.

At last Hank wrenched one hand free, and before the men could interfere, struck the woman with his clenched fist. She reeled and fell backward, striking her head sharply on a loose stone.

Joe Meek drew his gun and covered Hank as he straightened up and stood at bay. He waved the

others off with a grand gesture. "I'll attend to you now," he told him. "I'll take you, too, Nick Ridgely, and you." He pointed to their companions. "We have good use for our new jail. Lucky we had it ready, no matter if the settlers did complain at the expense of building it."

Salita sprang to Wild Flower Ann and with the help of John Barfield and his father succeeded in lifting her off the ground. She was unconscious, and blood dripped from the cut on the back of her head as they carried her into the cabin. "Go for Doc Histler," Salita begged, and John Barfield ran for his horse, forgetting the marshal and his four prisoners, but Joe Meek was abundantly able to handle the situation. They made no effort to resist him. His fame as sheriff in the Oregon country had long since gone abroad.

"Mount yer hosses," he ordered in a voice of thunder. Calling to Luke to bring in the nine head of horses after he had seen to his mother, he followed his captives with his gun conspicuously displayed over his saddle horn.

John Barfield's horse passed them on a run as he hurried for the doctor. Judge Barfield remained with Salita, helping her clumsily to undress the woman whose dead weight rested on the bed. Mattie Lou ran across the fields, to bring Aunt Fat and Uncle Sel, sobbing as she sped. Luke tethered Sundown and came in to kindle up a large fire and to mind the children. Consternation filled the cabin,

and yet when Salita came out of the bedroom she wore a look of exultation on her face.

"She remembered," she told Luke in a whisper. "If she recovers she may know us all again. I feel a great hope. Good may come from evil, after all." She hurried back, leaving Luke and Asahel with unashamed tears running down their faces.

Luke stood a moment looking at nothing, then gathered baby Joe in his arms and, followed by the other children, went slowly out to the field of carrots, where their noise would not disturb their mother.

"Nothing matters if only mother remembers," he said over and over to himself as he came back in an hour to see about preparing dinner. "Nothing matters if only mother comes back to us." He had resigned hope, and here was hope returned like the first robin after a long dreary winter of despair.

He hung about the bedroom door, not daring to go in for fear of disturbing his mother until Uncle Sel and Aunt Fat came up. He told them briefly what had happened, and as soon as Aunt Fat had prepared dinner drove the nine head of horses slowly to Oregon City.

He met John Barfield returning with Doc Histler, and urged them to hurry, then plodded onward. What did horses matter now? They could have the horses; there was hope for his poor mother. Then fear smote him—mother would die from the blow on her head! But better that than to live as she was. Anything but to have her go on as she had for the

last months. He tried to pray, but could think of no words.

Joe Meek inquired about Wild Flower Ann when he delivered the horses. "That Hank'll hang fer this ef your mother don't git well," the marshal assured the boy with sympathy in his eyes. "Like ez not there'll be a necktie party here soon's the settlers git wind o' this. A man thet'll strike a woman won't git no sympathy hereabouts."

He detained Luke to question him about the circumstances of the theft of the horses, and the boy told the whole story simply, going clear back to the death of Salita's father and mother and speaking in glowing words of Sour Gal, enlarging on her goodness and her straightforward honesty and steadfastness of purpose in keeping the family together until his uncle came to their rescue in the fall.

"Why didn't ye tell your story in the settlement?" Joe Meek wanted to know as he listened. "Folks here is kind and good. They'd 'a' helped ye."

Luke hesitated, then decided to make a clean breast of it, though he wished he might have talked the matter over with Salita before he divulged all the sordid details.

But he went bravely on, telling his sympathetic listener about their reception in Oregon City, recounting rather bitterly the gossip that had gone the rounds about the defenseless girl.

Joe Meek's eyes blazed with indignation as he listened, but he made no comment. "I reckon ye done

right accordin' ter yer lights," he approved. "Lucky ye overhauled them hoss thieves last night. They'd 'a' bin clear o' the country, hosses an' all, this morning and none o' us the wiser."

"Be there any immigrants in the settlement thet could bear ye out in this story o' the stolen hosses?"

Luke pondered a moment. "I heard that Pete Silcox has located in the Yamhill country, but we didn't see him. He helped hunt for Sissy and he would know our horses the minute he laid eyes on them."

"You an' me'll jist ride over to Yamhill in a few days and find this Pete Silcox, an' git him ter prove yer rights to them hosses. I'll ride along with ye now and go over ter thet thar 'Orphan's Home' and round up the stock I find thar. Like ez not some o' the settlers'll come up an' claim 'em."

They rode toward home in the evening, Luke feeling a bit contrite that he had told their story without Salita's permission.

"I hope yer mother hain't injured bad," Joe Meek said as they parted at the pasture bars. "Don't worry, boy; the hosses air yourn an' ye'll not have trouble getting possession o' 'em, er my name ain't Joe Meek an' I ain't United States marshal in Oregon Territory."

XXI

JOHN BARFIELD CLASHES WITH HIS MOTHER

John Barfield waited anxiously outside the cabin while the doctor attended to Wild Flower Ann. He hoped that Salita would come out and he would have a chance to speak to her. After a long half-hour his father came out and told him that there was nothing more that they could do. Aunt Fat would remain to sit with the sick woman that night.

They rode home, each occupied with his thoughts. When they reached the barn Judge Barfield led his son inside. Somehow they could talk better in its seclusion. "No need for worry, son; those horses belong to Sour Gal and she will have no trouble in proving her property. Nick Ridgely was just working off his grudge against you when he brought your name into this affair. You can't fight an unprincipled man before the whole settlement without his trying to get even with you."

"If I'd known I might have protected Sour Gal in some way," John Barfield faltered. "If she'd only trust me and confide in me; but she never has. No one here knew that she'd ever owned horses. I can't understand her."

"Don't worry," Judge Barfield repeated. "If

Wild Flower Ann recovers, Doc Histler says she may remember; if she dies, it's better so. Things will come out right for that plucky girl in the end. I am sure of it." He smiled and laid his hand on his son's shoulder. "I must see to the haying down in the lower field. You go in and reassure your mother. She's very anxious about you. I shouldn't have left her this morning, but it was my duty to go over there and see what I could do. I'm sorry your mother heard Joe Meek charge you as he did, but it can't be helped now."

John Barfield stood watching his father go down to the hay-field, waiting until he was clear out of sight before he made his reluctant way to the house. His mother's reproaches were going to be very hard to bear.

Mrs. Barfield met him at the door, her eyes blazing in her white face. "So you're a horse thief, are you?" The question was a charge.

"No, mother," John said patiently. "No horses have been stolen. Sour Gal will be able to prove that they belonged to her—were stolen from her at Emigrant Springs. Joe Meek took Nick Ridgely and those three strange men to jail. Wild Flower Ann remembered one of them and he struck her. She is unconscious from hitting her head as she fell. I would have been home before but I went for the doctor. He's over there now." He fairly poured out his explanations before his mother tried to check him.

"As usual, your first concern is for that hussy.

You never gave a thought to your poor mother," Mrs. Barfield said in a voice charged with self-pity.

"I'll not hear a word against that girl." John faced his mother angrily. "Never mention her name again in my presence if you cannot speak decently of her."

"I have never before been reprimanded by you. This is not the time to begin. I'll answer to no son of mine for my utterances," Mrs. Barfield told him in a steely voice.

"If you ever speak ill of her again in my presence, I leave this house, once for all. I've reached the limit of endurance." John Barfield's voice resembled his mother's as he made the statement.

"That Sour Gal has had her cap set for you since the day she arrived in Oregon City. I know women. She's intended all the time to marry you. You're just putty in her hands. You've so far forgotten your sense of decency as to allow your name to be coupled with hers in a horse-stealing affair. You've brought disgrace on your family name. Your father and mother must suffer humiliation at your conduct. Night after night you've come in at ungodly hours without offering the least explanation of your whereabouts, as if I didn't know where you were. The whole settlement is gossiping about your affairs. I'll never hold my head up again." Mrs. Barfield, ordinarily a woman of few words, now knew no inhibition. Her tongue cut John Barfield like a rapier, but he remembered his father's admonition and made no

answer, just mentally bracing himself to bear each thrust.

"You may as well admit that you mean to marry Sour Gal," his mother went on, goaded by his silence. "I have an idea that it's all settled between you."

"I've asked her to marry me, and she has refused flatly. There is not the least hope for me, and I know it." John Barfield's words were a groan of misery.

"Won't marry you, won't she?" Mrs. Barfield changed front completely. "Who is she—Sour Gal, loathsome name for a decent woman to go by—who is she that she would refuse a Barfield? She rejected you, did she? You, who can have your choice of the girls in the settlement? She's just leading you on, making a cat's paw of you for her own evil purposes. She'll marry you soon enough when the time comes."

"I only wish that were true," John Barfield said hopelessly. "She knows I'd give my very life for her, but I must accept her decision as final, though that will not prevent my doing anything I can to protect her reputation. No one shall speak ill of a girl I love, not even my own mother." He turned to leave the room.

Mrs. Barfield, now fairly beside herself, barred the way. "We'll settle this matter once for all right here," she announced, "and then never mention it again while we live."

"Yes," the young man agreed.

"You are never to see or speak to that brazen

hussy again. You may choose right now between her and your father and mother and your home. Give me your promise in this and everything will be as before. Your father and I have never known peace since that immigrant family arrived here last fall. All things must end some time; now is the time." She covered her face with her hands to hide her tears. Never before had John seen her give way to weeping.

The sight completely unnerved him. He took her in his arms, soothing her as one would a child. At last she wiped her eyes on an immaculate handkerchief that she drew from the bosom of her dress and turned to him with complete confidence. "Now promise what I ask of you, John," she pleaded.

"I can never promise that, mother," the young man said firmly. "I'd marry Sour Gal tomorrow if she would only consent, but you may rest in peace. She'll never be my wife. She has told me so and she is not one to change her mind."

"Then you refuse to give me your promise, John," Mrs. Barfield said, aghast, her eyes cold and piercing as she confronted him.

John Barfield's glance did not waver. His eyes were of the same icy blue as hers. Steel on steel. She had gone down to defeat before him and in an instant she realized the fact.

At last she turned to the family Bible lying open on its own small table, with her spectacles beside it. John watched her closely, thinking that now he must hear a chapter of Scripture to bring him over to her

way of thinking. But he saw in a moment that this was not his mother's intention. She opened a small drawer in the table and drew out a pearl-handled penknife, balancing it thoughtfully in her hand before she trusted herself to speak.

"I'll give you a moment to think about the seriousness of this step you are taking. If you refuse to promise me what I ask, you are no longer a son of ours. When you go forth from this house you must never expect to darken its doors again, nor see your mother, dead or alive."

She began slowly turning the leaves of the Bible while she waited for his answer, but none came. She had found the family record by this time and stood with penknife poised over it. Slowly she read the names of two children who had died in infancy, pausing at the entry recording their death.

John Barfield watched her with a strange fascination. His mother loved him. She was just upset from the shock she had received that morning, and so was trying to force him into making a promise that she had no right to extort from him. No matter if she were a helpless woman who was used to having her own way in everything, this was going too far. He could not, would not promise.

"I can't, mother. I'm going now. I'll never make an effort to see you again or speak to you if you will have it that way, but you will live to regret your action, I know."

Mrs. Barfield did not turn, but found the space

where the name, John Marshall Barfield, born April twenty-third, 1823, was recorded in his father's bold handwriting. How often he had read that page as he turned the leaves of the old Bible over during family worship. Deliberately she applied the penknife, making a faint grating noise. John went into his room and closed the door after him, to shut out the sound.

He stood for a moment looking about the room where his various treasured possessions were arrayed in the orderly fashion for which his mother was justly noted.

Mrs. Barfield called to him in a matter-of-fact voice after a few minutes. "You'll find that old haircloth trunk in the storeroom, John. Pack all your clothing. Take your horse and leave the house before supper-time. I'll see that your baggage follows you tomorrow."

The faint scratching was resumed. It filled his consciousness to the exclusion of everything else. Then anger overcame him. For once his mother had gone too far. He had been sure that she only meant to coerce him with threats, but no self-respecting man would stand by and see his name scratched out of the family record.

He began to pack his belongings mechanically, the habits so thoroughly ingrained in him asserting themselves even in a crisis. He opened the chest of drawers and took out his clean clothing and placed each garment in its exact folds in the battered old

horsehair trunk. How friendly that old trunk seemed; in his boyhood he had used it for a horse on rainy days in the attic.

He wondered if he had better see his father before he left, but decided that he would be acting like a spoiled child if he ran to him with his trouble. No, his father must come to him. He hurried a bit with the packing, pausing to listen as his father's step sounded at the kitchen door. The scratching had ceased; his mother had been moving about for some time, probably preparing supper. She spoke to the Indian woman a time or two.

At length his father and mother came into the sitting-room and the door closed sharply. He was strapping the trunk when his father opened his door and stepped inside, closing it carefully after him.

For the first time he noticed that his father was ageing. The hair at his temples was thin and gray. Curious that he had not seen this before. Judge Barfield's face worked. John waited for him to speak.

"Best put your things back in their place and come on to supper," he said at length.

"I cannot, father," John told him. "Mother has scratched my name out of the Bible and told me never to darken her door again. I'm leaving at once. My trunk is ready now. She promised to send it after me in the morning."

Judge Barfield flinched as if he had been struck. "Scratched your name out of the Bible?" His voice

rose as he took in the full import of the statement. Then he spoke in a lower tone: "Your mother would never do that. No matter what you do to displease her, you are still her son, the only child she has."

"Look for yourself," John Barfield said, and left the house by the front door. He hurried to the barn and saddled his horse and was out in the road before he gave himself time to think. He had decided, while packing, that he would go to the hotel kept by Sydney Moss, and stay there until he found work. He would have no difficulty in haying-time with so many men away in California.

He wished it were earlier in the season. He would go to the mines, as he had wanted so much to do last year. No, he would not go to the gold-fields in any event. It would look like he was running away from his difficulties, and, besides, Salita might relent. If he left now he relinquished even the slight chance he had of winning her. She would return to the States and he would never see her again.

A longing to see Salita overpowered him. There would be no harm in inquiring for Wild Flower Ann before he rode into Oregon City. He might be able to manage a word with the girl at the door. He wheeled his horse about and rode swiftly to the cabin. Asahel was milking in the barnyard as he came up. There was no change in his mother's condition, the boy told him. "I think mother is going to die," he said and began to cry.

John hastened to reassure him: "Mother'll be bet-

ter in the morning, I'm sure of it. I must speak to Salita. Will you tell her I am waiting?" He had very little hope that she would come out, but still he felt he must make the effort to gain a word with her. Asahel went indoors at once, and after a long wait, in which he gave up in despair and then hoped again, he saw the door of the sick-room open and the girl came out to the fence.

"Is there anything I can do to help you, Salita?" John asked anxiously. "How is Wild Flower Ann?"

"She's still unconscious," Salita said, ignoring his first question. "The doctor can't tell, but I'm terribly afraid she will not live. It's concussion of the brain; there's a bad cut on her head." But she brightened: "If she lives she may be right in her mind. I can only pray." Bright tears stood in her tired eyes as she turned to go in again.

"I'll be at Sydney Moss's hotel for the next few days if you want me," John told her after a bit of hesitation.

Salita divined the reason for his leaving home, but forbore to speak of it, his distress was so apparent. "I'm sorry I brought you into that trouble over the horses," she said. "I meant to tell you this morning how much we regret involving you in our affairs. This terrible thing that has happened to Wild Flower Ann drove everything else clear out of our heads. We should have known better than to borrow your pony, but neither Luke nor I thought of it at the time."

"You know I'll stand by you no matter what happens," John said. "I'm sure you'll reclaim your horses without the least difficulty."

Salita held out her hand to him, smiling with difficulty. He seized it in his with wordless sympathy. She was gone like a flash.

John Barfield was reluctant to go to Oregon City in the daylight. The whole town would be agog with the latest gossip about Sour Gal. By putting two and two together it would be easy to piece out the story of his leaving home. For himself he did not care, but to have the affairs of the girl and his difficulty with his mother bandied about on idle tongues was going to be hard to bear. He wondered, as he rode along in the cool night, if it would not have been better to have gone to Uncle Sel's, but decided that it didn't much matter. It would be impossible to keep the story from spreading, anyway.

John asked for a room at the hotel and was told that his father had engaged one for him an hour ago and was awaiting his arrival. He went up the narrow stairs and opened the door. His eyes fell first on the horsehair trunk. Then his father was in full accord with his mother in this affair. He was disowned.

His father's face in the candle-light startled him. Strange the change a few hours of suffering could make in a man.

"Sit down, son," Judge Barfield said in an effort to make the situation casual. "I brought your

trunk in for you. It seems best for you to stay away from home a few days to give mother time to come to her senses. I'm sorry for your mother. She is suffering just as you and I are, even more so, for she is your mother, but she will learn only, like the rest of mankind, through agony."

"I'm sorry for mother. It was hard not to make the promise to her, but I can't and keep my self-respect."

"No, son, you can't. Much as I love your mother, I'll admit that she had no right to coerce you in any such a fashion. There's a hard streak in the Marshalls—Puritanism gone to seed. I took occasion to remind her of a number of incidents that happened long ago. Disowning children sort of runs in her family. You didn't know that she never saw her parents after she eloped with me?"

"Eloped with you?" John echoed. Here was a chapter in the family history that had been sealed to him.

"Yes, eloped with me." Judge Barfield smiled, his eyes twinkling with the memory. "I wasn't exactly the pillar of righteousness then that I am today, and besides I was poor and had no prospects. Her family simply cast her off and we moved from Boston to New York State long before you were born."

"Mother never saw her parents again?" John questioned. He had often wondered about her people, but had never dared ask. She had always been singularly reticent about her affairs.

"Disinheriting children was fashionable in those days. And a wayward son or daughter was often just one who chose a course in life contrary to the one their parents had mapped out for them. I never held with managing other people's lives. Your mother has often blamed me for my lax discipline where you were concerned, but I've always found you a dutiful son."

"Then mother cannot blame me for wanting to marry Salita," John told his father hotly. "I'm only doing just as she did."

"That's what I pointed out to her, and I think she is beginning to see the light. I put your name back in the Bible. We'll not go any farther into our family troubles, but understand, John, you're my son and your mother's son and your home is always open to you, no matter what your mother may say or do."

"But, father, I can't come home while mother feels as she does."

"I know, and perhaps it'll be best for you to be away until mother comes round to our way of thinking. Just take her at her word and see what happens. You're the very core of her heart. Having you where she can't see that you are well taken care of isn't going to be as easy as she imagines." He rose to go. "What do you mean to do, John?" he asked at the door.

"Find work as a farm hand through haying," John told him.

"Good! That'll be the bitterest medicine your

mother ever swallowed, but the stronger the dose the more good it does in this case. Stick to it, son, you're just about through the woods; and—" he turned back and closed the door—"if that Sour Gal'll marry you—and I rather think she will—remember you have my blessing. I've always admired that girl. She's one in a thousand, straight and honest and full of spirit."

"But she has refused to marry me," John told his father dismally.

"Oh, pshaw!" Judge Barfield ejaculated. "A determined young man never takes no for an answer. As I said, things'll break your way before long, mark my words, and once your mother is won over she'll fairly idolize that girl. Your mother's like that. Her own can do no wrong. She'll come round all right. Just you leave her alone for a little while."

"She'll have to invite me back before I come," John said, his lips tightening, "and if Salita can ever be persuaded to marry me, mother must treat her like a daughter."

"She will, son, never fear. I must hurry home. I'll see you again soon. Good-by and good luck." He gripped his son's hand and descended the stairs, none too confidently, John thought. Father was just whistling to keep up his courage. Once alone, the last vestige of hope left him. His mother had ruined his life. He undressed and lay down, wide-eyed, on the hard cot.

XXII

MRS. BARFIELD MAKES A MORNING CALL

Salita was brought to realize the kindness innate in men and women during the weeks that followed. Wild Flower Ann did not regain consciousness for three days, but lay in a stupor from which Doctor Histler warned them to make no attempt to rouse her. He called every day, bringing pills and dosage in his leather saddle-bags. He sat sometimes an hour at a time beside the sick bed, his face entirely without expression. Doctor Histler had never been known to express a professional opinion. He gave directions for administering the medicine and left each day, refusing to discuss the case with any of them.

The women of the settlement took turns with the nursing, though haying was at its height, and many of them had no husbands to depend upon in getting in the crops. But no frontier woman will consider her own duties when there is illness in the neighborhood; she simply leaves her affairs, no matter how involved, in the hands of the children and takes up her position in a stricken household until another neighbor with the same loving spirit comes to relieve her.

Capable Aunt Morning Ann Simmons remained

the first three days, never removing her clothing, just snatching what sleep she could in a chair by the bedside. Martha Bainbridge took her place, while Nettie Harper sent in large quantities of cooked food and promised to come as soon as she was called.

Aunt Fat took the three younger children and the baby home with her and kept them. Little Joe was creeping and into everything. Salita was greatly relieved when they were off her mind. Mattie Lou worked like a grown woman, never having to be told twice to perform her duties, as she often did in normal times.

The farm work never lapsed for a moment, though Salita gave no thought to it. Luke and Asahel carried on manfully, swinging the scythe from daylight until darkness overtook them in the field. The welfare of their cattle depended upon the wild hay that lay in fragrant windrows in the meadow. Men from neighboring farms came to help with the work from time to time. Crops must not languish for want of attention.

July came in with smothering heat; the hoe had to be kept going in the potatoes before the tops began to die down. Joe Meek waited until haying was over before he came to take Luke over to the Yamhill country in search of the Silcox family. He had found twenty head of horses and they were safely corralled and fed at the expense of the Oregon Territory. Settlers from remote farms had visited the

herd and identified five head of horses whose brands had been altered or obliterated with a mark called "a window."

Salita and Luke had unwittingly captured a band of horse thieves.

Luke was loath to leave home; his anxiety for his mother overcame every other emotion. He told Salita, and she agreed with him, that the horses did not matter in the least; they had no time to think of material things when a life hung trembling in the balance. Whenever the boy could find a spare moment he spent it outside his mother's door, listening with his heart in his mouth for the faint sounds from within, though he never ventured to enter, for fear of disturbing her.

Doctor Histler told them that they could expect no change for a day or so and the boy finally departed with misgivings. Wild Flower Ann had succumbed to a low fever after the stupor of the first few days. She knew no one, and if she spoke at all, which she seldom did, it was to babble of her childhood days in Kentucky, or to caution her old nurse, Mammy Rachel, to take better care of the children.

Every remedy that women could think of was applied in addition to the old doctor's strong potions. Time wore on without the slightest change unless it was that the patient steadily grew weaker.

Luke returned after three days. Pete Silcox had gone to the gold-fields and his family were in desperate circumstances. The shiftless mother was mak-

ing a rather feeble effort to carry on the farm work, depending mostly on willing neighbors for food and assistance. She corroborated Luke's story down to the last detail and he drove the ten head of horses home with him. Salita had come into her own.

Indignation ran high in Oregon City over the horse-stealing and the assault upon Wild Flower Ann. Hank and his two cohorts were still in jail, with Nick Ridgely keeping them company. Their trial had been set for late August. Joe Meek had been inclined to incarcerate Joel Ridgely along with his brother; the evidence against him was slight, though every one was sure that both were involved in the horse-stealing. But he was devoted to his bed-ridden mother and there would be no one to care for her if he were taken into custody. The two Commissioners of the Poor, appointed under the Provisional Government, were of the opinion that he should be allowed his liberty, especially as money in the territorial treasury was low, owing to the cost of the recent Cayuse war that had been waged after the Whitman massacre.

July wore on, intense in its heat. The vegetables from the garden supported the table lavishly. A matter for which to be very thankful, Salita told Luke as she set the long table for the men who came and went, helping with the farm work, and the women who took turns in the nursing of Wild Flower Ann.

How she lived through those days Salita could not

understand afterwards. She seldom undressed at night any more, but sat by the bedside, fanning the patient. The administering of the medicine she would intrust to no one. There were five kinds that the doctor left, besides the home remedies the women used. Every hour, night and day, some potion was poured down the unprotesting throat of Wild Flower Ann, and yet there was no sign of the fever's abating.

"A fever jist run hits course," Aunt Morning Ann comforted, when the hopes of Salita and the children wavered. "With the turn of some night afore long yer pore mother'll wake up an' know ye all. Powerful weak she'll be, but she'll know ye er—" She did not finish. Luke and Salita knew what she meant, though.

Nettie Harper came, true to her word, and proved a tower of strength to Salita, whose energies were flagging with the heat and the watching by the bedside. She took charge of the cooking and did big washings of the borrowed bed linen that the neighbors sent in. No kindly woman who could render the slightest service to the stricken family overlooked a single detail. Mrs. Barfield did not come, but Judge Barfield regularly brought over a huge basket of cooked food, lingering a bit to speak reassuringly to Salita.

Nettie Harper could turn off more work in a given time in the kitchen than any woman Salita had ever seen. The domestic machinery ran as if

freshly oiled when she was about. She had a gentle hand in the sick-room, too, and was always thinking of new things to do for the comfort of the sufferer. The sun poured glaring heat through the window and open door. She sent Luke for good-sized fir trees to be set up around the entire south and west side of the sick-room, making it a dark fragrant bower. She hung wet sheets from the rafters, replacing them every half-hour or so as the evaporation cooled the air even on the hottest day. If she could find nothing else to occupy herself, she fought flies, fanning Wild Flower Ann with an old newspaper cut in long strips and pasted on a handle. The patient seemed better on the days that Nettie Harper was with her.

She cheered Salita, too, as they toiled in the hot kitchen. All the gossip of the settlement was at her tongue's end. The girl found herself listening intently to tale after tale, and never thought to reproach herself for her enjoyment.

She enlarged on the story of the controversy over the jail. Telling how on the death of Ewing Young, who drove the first band of longhorned cattle up from California, the Provisional Government had been organized to take charge of his estate, as he left no heirs. After long wrangling over the disposal of the money a log jail costing $1,750 was erected in Oregon City. "Though land knows what folks wanted of a jail," Mrs. Harper commented. "There never was anyone to put in it, no matter

how much Joe Meek scoured the country. And mark my words," she continued, "the time will come when folks will have to pay those heirs of Ewing Young. Never a rich man died yet without his kin from somewhere turning up to claim the property."

Wyonoshut came one day while Nettie Harper was there. He had two ponies with two sacks of *ictas* on each that he wished to store in their barn. He spent a day sorting his treasures, then went hunting and came back with a deer over his shoulders, which he deposited on the kitchen floor with a grunt. "Heap much *tillicums* for eat, need-um meat," he said and was gone the next morning before the family were astir.

"Queer Indian," Nettie Harper told Salita. "He likes you for your *pil tupsoe* (red hair). He's perfectly harmless, if he is a bit cracked. He spends his time going back and forth over the mountains, gathering up *ictas*, and bringing them to some barn in the settlement for safe keeping."

Salita told her how he had befriended them on the trail.

"Yes, he has helped many an immigrant. He's known by the whites as McKay, but nothing makes him angrier than to give him his name. He's a Yamhill Indian, and along in 1820, so they say, a trapper named McKay was killed by his tribe. His father was chief and the other tribes gave him the name of their victim as a punishment. A name given

so goes from father to son, but the settlers who love the old man ignore his shame and call him Wyonoshut."

One night when Salita stepped out to the orchard for a breath of air after spending the first watch by the bedside of Wild Flower Ann she noticed the sky to the north lit halfway to the zenith. She spoke of it to Mrs. Harper when she went in. They wondered if a house in Oregon City had burned, but did not concern themselves very much over it. The sick woman absorbed every bit of their thought. Next morning Judge Barfield, coming over with an armload of sheets, told them that the jail had caught fire in the night and the four prisoners awaiting trial had escaped during the confusion.

"Indications point to an outside accomplice. Joel Ridgely is suspected, but there's no direct evidence. We are saved the expense of a trial. Hank would very likely have received the extreme penalty and the others would never have gotten off easily," the judge told them.

"I'm glad," Salita said simply. "Hanging a man would not help Wild Flower Ann, and at least she would be spared the humiliation of appearing at the trial."

Nettie Harper remained nearly a week in August when the patient was nearing the crisis, though the fever had not broken and she showed no signs of returning rationality. None of them had the least

hope, though Salita tried bravely to encourage Luke when his spirits failed.

The subject of the trouble in the Barfield family was broached a time or two, but dropped at Salita's apparent indifference. She simply could not bear to hear John Barfield's name mentioned, and shifted the conversation tactfully when it threatened. Her heart ached with longing to see him. Sometimes she felt she must send for him, but resisted. Her business was to forget, and the trials of that long summer filled her mind to the exclusion of everything else. When she was able to snatch an hour's sleep, she must not brood; her all-too-tired body forbade her this luxury.

Luke told her that John Barfield was working for a farmer twenty miles up the valley for a dollar a day through harvest, and that folks said that his mother and father had driven him away. He didn't believe Judge Barfield would do such a thing, though that old woman was just plain mean. He had always hated her. Salita reproved him. She wondered if Luke suspected the state of affairs between them.

When Nettie Harper finally departed, Salita was genuinely sorry to see her go. In the face of her kindness she had forgiven her for gossiping.

Aunt Morning Ann Simmons came to take Mrs. Harper's place, shaking her head sadly as she looked at the wasted form lying so quietly on the bed. "No

change yet," she mourned, "but never fear hit's not long away."

Salita had not taken her clothes off for the last three days and Aunt Morning Ann urged her to rest. "Ye'll sleep better in the barn, now the hay's in," the kind old lady said. "I'll not let airy soul come anigh ye."

The sun was just rising as Salita, staggering with weariness, made her way to the haymow with an old quilt to lie upon. How good rest would seem! She felt as if she had never in her life been fully rested. Eight weeks of fever in a household certainly wears down the vitality.

Chancing to look up the road just at the barn door, she saw a woman running toward her. Rather against her inclination she waited. Perhaps she had not been noticed and could slip off to sleep. But on looking again she saw it was Mrs. Barfield. The girl's heart stood still in her breast. John was dead! Nothing but death would bring Mrs. Barfield to her.

Stumbling she hurried to meet her. "What is it, Mrs. Barfield?" she hardly dared ask for fear of the answer.

One look into Mrs. Barfield's face and she was sure that her first impression had been correct. The fastidious lady was gone. The gray hair that always lay so primly in waves around her temples was disarranged. Her black-and-white calico dress was wet with dew almost to the knees. She had come through

the fields, never troubling to hold up her skirts. But her face! Much as she disliked the woman, Salita was moved to pity when she looked at her. Drawn and haggard, the color of yellow wrinkled parchment where she had once been like a delicate bit of old ivory, sorrow had completely changed Mrs. Barfield.

"Oh, what is it?" Salita implored, dreading to hear, yet in a frenzy to know the worst.

"I'm under conviction of sin, Sour Gal." She paused perceptibly on the name as if loath to utter it. "I'm a wicked old woman, but I've repented of my sins and prayed on my knees night after night for forgiveness."

Salita could only stare at her in amazement and relief that her sudden terrible fear had no ground.

"I've come"—the tears were streaming down Mrs. Barfield's face—"I've come to ask you to forgive me for the wrong I've done you." She hurried on with her confession as if she feared her spirit would fail her. "I never believed that gossip about you. I cannot understand my own wicked pride. I knew a long time ago that John loved you, and it nearly drove me mad."

"Why, Mrs. Barfield," Salita said after a pause while John's mother waited for her to speak, wrapping and unwrapping a sodden handkerchief around her fingers and searching her face for signs of its softening, "why, of course, I'll forgive you! I understand how you felt, but you might have known

that I could not marry John nor any other man with the stain that rests on my name."

"But you love John." Mrs. Barfield looked at her searchingly, her tears suddenly dried. "I want you to marry him. No one shall ever breathe a word against you again."

Salita sobbed weakly, but turned a brave face to John's mother. "No," she said, "I never could," and turned away.

Mrs. Barfield's slender body shook again with her sobs. "My sin has brought its punishment," she faltered. "Such wickedness could never go without judgment while a just God reigns in heaven. I drove my son away and told him I would never see him again, dead or alive. I scr—" But she could not bring herself to finish; her ignominy was too much for weak flesh to confess.

Impulsively Salita threw her arms around the quivering old shoulders and kissed Mrs. Barfield on the mouth. "He'll come home again when you ask him. I'm going away soon and he'll forget me. We expect the children's uncle from the States most any day now." She kissed her again and gropingly felt her way to the haymow.

Carefully she spread the quilt that she had caught up from the fence on the soft hay and lay prone upon it with closed eyes through which healing tears fell. The old ache was gone. Renunciation was not going to be so hard now that she had forgiven the wrong. As soon as Uncle Riley Chatham came, she

would sell her horses and take the first boat around the Horn for Kentucky. Poor Wild Flower Ann would either be dead or on the road to recovery by that time. She sank into the cool depths of sleep with the tears drying on her pale cheeks.

XXIII

RELEASE

Still no change in Wild Flower Ann. Word was whispered around among the women that Doctor Histler had given her up to die, though no one was found to whom the old doctor had spoken. Nettie Harper fought for the life of the sufferer, as if somehow she could hold her feet from slipping into the grave by the strength of her own will. Salita felt relief when she appeared at the cabin door, announcing that she had arranged to stay a few days.

The whole life of the household, in fact the life of the community, centered about the sick-room. Every night the watchers felt sure that this would be the last, and still Wild Flower Ann, with a vitality that surprised them all, was alive and a bit stronger in the morning, only to lose and sink again as the fever came up in the afternoon.

All were agreed that there was but little chance of her recovering her sanity. She had recognized no one since Hank struck her, and for weeks had not spoken at all except to cry feebly for water or to tell them of her pain. Most of the time she refused food, though once or twice she had asked for chicken

broth and their spirits had risen when she took nourishment.

Nettie Harper began to fear for Salita. She was thin and pale with her long vigil. Sometimes other members of a family, worn out with nursing, succumbed to a lingering fever. She feared that Wild Flower Ann's fever was a form of malaria. This disease was prevalent with the breaking up of the soil in Oregon. Once she followed the doctor out and tried in vain to pin him down and wrest an answer to her questions from him, but he simply mounted his horse and rode off in silence.

Aunt Morning Ann Simmons, noting the girl's listlessness and pallor, began concocting simples for her. She made her drink a cup of strong tansy tea each morning and gave her an infusion of dogwood and chittim bark mixed with the root of Oregon grape. This was known as the Oregon cure-all. Every one took it regardless of his or her symptoms.

But overwork and worry and heartache were Salita's maladies, and until the load lifted there was no cure. She plodded on, her brown eyes big in her white face, and smiled at their efforts to cure her with medicine.

Harvesting began in August. There were men to be fed. The threshing crew moved from farm to farm, storing the precious yellow grain. Women moved along with them, stopping at each farmhouse to help feed the hungry men. Under ordinary conditions housewives were taxed to the limit of their

strength during August, and with a woman lying at the point of death in the cabin this was an ordeal. The men remained three days.

Aunt Fat was obliged to come over to help, and the children underfoot added very materially to the burden of heat and flies and the preparation of unbelievable quantities of food over an open fireplace that seared the face with its heat.

They decided the second day to build a fire and cook outdoors. Uncle Sel stopped in the evening and built a rude framework of rocks and clay, covered with an iron grid, and the women toiled over the flame from early in the morning until bedtime.

Salita's nerves were raw with the confusion of it all. The talk that went round the long table scarcely interested her. The vanguard of the immigrant train of 1849 was beginning to arrive. Rumor had it that 35,000 people were crossing the Plains this year, though most of them would go to California. Later, the settlers predicted, they would find their way to Oregon. The gold-fields were proving a disappointment. Early in the spring a number of men had returned, some with a few thousand dollars in gold dust, but most of them almost destitute and broken in body with the fever that raged in the new country.

Salita and Luke were straining every nerve to hold things together until Uncle Riley Chatham and his family came. They kept a constant eye on the road. He might arrive any day now. By the first

of September surely he would be there. He had good horses and ample equipment and could certainly make good time if they met with no disaster on the road.

The crew moved on. Salita could have wept from sheer relief. She rested until noon the morning after their departure, then dragged herself by an effort of will to the cabin to prepare something for Luke and Asahel to eat. Nettie Harper was busy in the sick-room and Mattie Lou had gone to the spring for water. A man came up as she was lifting a kettle of string beans left from the orgy of food of the day before. Thinking one of the crew had returned for something and would pass on to the barn, she wasted no energy in turning from her work at the fire until the man reached her.

She dropped the pot of beans in her amazement. Joe Harkness had come! At first she thought she was faint, perhaps she was taking the fever and this was delirium. Here was an uneasy ghost risen to confront her; but when he spoke she knew that it was Joe Harkness in the flesh.

"Salita," he said, "I've come at last."

Salita sat down weakly on a bench near the table. Mattie Lou, coming up, suppressed a scream of joy, thinking of her mother and that she must never make an unnecessary sound.

Joe Harkness seized the water and bathed Salita's white face until she pulled herself together. Then Mattie Lou flew into his arms, clasping her bony

little hands tightly about his neck. "Father, father!" she choked while he stroked her hair tenderly, tears running down her cheeks.

"You're all alive and safe?" he inquired anxiously of Salita. "I asked for you in the settlement and no one seemed to know the family by name, but after I described the children and told them of a red-headed girl who was in the party, they told me how to reach this cabin. I couldn't be sure until I saw you under the trees."

"We're all alive," Salita told him through bright tears.

"Where's mother?" Joe Harkness asked Mattie Lou. "I'll go to her."

Salita laid a detaining hand on his arm, and Mattie Lou burst into a paraxosm of weeping.

"Mrs. Harkness has had eight weeks of fever," she told him, hating to mar his joy in his homecoming. "We despair of her life. The fever broke day before yesterday, but she is not conscious yet." How could she tell him the long story, she wondered. And yet she must. He might destroy the slight chance of life that Cynthia Harkness had if he went to her bedside now. And yet—hope raised a drooping head—this might be just the tonic the sick woman needed.

"Call Mrs. Harper. She'll tell your father what to do," Salita subsided on the bench as Mattie Lou tiptoed cautiously to the door of the sick-room.

Nettie Harper came out softly with a finger on her lips. "Your mother is asleep. I'll leave her just

a moment for a bite of dinner." She drew back when she saw the strange man in buckskins sitting on the bench by Salita.

"It's father, oh, it's father come home to us!" Mattie Lou whispered, fairly beside herself with her joy. Now that she realized that father was not a delusion, she ran like the wind to the field for Luke and Asahel.

Salita introduced Mrs. Harper and she told him of his wife's condition, adding that she would not dare allow him to enter the sick-room until the doctor consented. He agreed with her, and Salita said they would send one of the boys for Doctor Histler at once. Mrs. Harper, seeing that the man wished to talk with Salita, withdrew tactfully.

Before she was out of hearing, Joe Harkness began plying Salita with questions. She could not pause, in answering him, to inquire where he had been nor how he reached the settlement. All that could wait; it was enough for the present to know that he was alive and at home after a long year when his family had mourned him as dead.

Luke and Asahel could only grasp their father's hand shyly. Asahel trembled so he could hardly bridle Garnet to ride for Doctor Histler. Mattie Lou hurried to bring the children home and to tell Aunt Fat and Uncle Sel the wonderful news.

They came up in an hour, Mattie Lou busily scrubbing the last vestige of molasses off Sissy's face with her apron as they alighted from Uncle Sel's

wagon. Luke gave baby Joe proudly into his father's arms, lifting his red curls lovingly as he did so.

Asahel had spread the news of his father's return. Friends followed him and the doctor gave his permission for Joe Harkness to see his wife for a moment. "She's asleep now, and probably will not waken," Nettie Harper told them.

"Father has come! Father has come!" The place fairly rang with the children's joy, though they dared not lift their voices for fear of disturbing their mother.

With remarkable self-possession Joe Harkness looked down at his sleeping wife, her skin drawn tightly over her cheek-bones, the hair that had been her glory shorn from her head, and rejoiced. "She will live," he told Nettie Harper, who was wiping her eyes on her apron. "I'll nurse her back in a few weeks. You can all sleep tonight. She'll know me when she wakes. Thank God, I am in time."

He made his way out to the others with a confident step. The head of the Harkness household had returned and was in authority.

Neighbors crowded around him, asking for his story. They all repaired to the shade of the barn to hear it. He was ordinarily a man of few words. He told but little now, saying that he would reserve the details for long winter evenings around the fireside.

"I took Pompey and went after the cattle the Indians had stolen," he said. "We were captured by

a band of Cayuses and taken to a camp back in the fastnesses of the Blue Mountains. I could not understand why the rogues had not killed us until long afterward. *Pil tupsoe!* No Indian in his senses would dare to harm a red-headed man. And then, you know how the squaws admire a nigger. They made a pet of Pompey, giving him the best of their food and waiting on him hand and foot." He smiled at the recollection. "Pompey thought he'd got to nigger heaven for sure.

"They kept me bound in one of their tepees. It was late fall before they were willing to give me even the freedom of their lodge. I'd have been a prisoner among them yet, but Pompey persuaded the squaws to turn me loose. Winter had set in and there was nothing to do but stay with them until spring, trusting that I could prevail upon them to conduct me to the settlement as soon as the snow was out of the mountains. I was sure my family had died. You can imagine how I felt leaving my wife to give birth to a baby alone on the trail."

The men nodded in silent sympathy and the women wept openly.

"I could only hope that they would fall in with some company and make their way to the settlement, but there were times when I gave up in despair. Pompey and I talked our plan over and over. He knew that the squaws would never give him up willingly, and the old rascal didn't want to leave, anyway. Finally the chief agreed to take me to the

settlement when they came down after *olallies* (huckleberries) and here I am. I didn't mind losing the nigger, though. I've heard that slaves aren't welcome in Oregon." His brief tale ended, he hurried to take his place at his wife's bedside.

Salita rose and followed him, and Uncle Sel turned to the group when they were out of earshot. "Ye see now what it means ter suspicion a innercent gal, ye low-lived bunch o' polecats? Whut ye think o' yerselfs now?" He shook an angry fist at them all, and they meekly took his reprimand.

"Now, Pa," Aunt Fat endeavored to restrain her spouse, "ye ain't so blameless yourself. Didn't ye name her Sour Gal? Hit's all over an' done with. The settlers sure done theirselfs proud a-standin' by thet gal when she needed 'em. They never right down suspicioned her at the fust. Ye got ter be just, Pa."

"Wal," Uncle Sel drawled, "Sour Gal's a right good name, ain't we often said. What good pies that narrer-leaved dock makes when hit's sweetened 'ith molasses? Sour Gal air plumb sweetened up now."

"Uncle Sel's right," one of the women affirmed, and the others agreed. "We did draw away and heap shame on that poor girl, but she conducted herself like a queen through it all."

"Beat's time how she managed this ahere farm. I swan ter guinea ef her an' Luke didn't have the best crap o' any o' the settlers, an' her a raisin' a

puny baby by hand, an' tendin' ter a addled woman ter boot. I plumb envy the man whut marries thet gal."

"Ye know good'n well who ter envy," Uncle Sel chortled, slapping his sides and laughing over his joke. They all knew, and the laughter that followed his sally was whole-hearted and genuine.

"Luke's pa hez reason ter be proud o' him. Thet boy'll make his mark in the world," Aunt Fat declared.

The burden of the Harkness family dropped from Salita's shoulders. Joe Harkness began nursing his wife with the tenderness of a woman. Next day she opened her eyes after a natural sleep and reached out a thin hand for his. "I knew you'd come back, Joe." Her voice was so low he bent to hear her slow words. She slept again. "Did you find the cattle?" she asked when she awoke. "I've been so worried lately, but it's all over now like a bad dream. Please see what the children are doing. Buddy is so fretful. Call Salita in." Cynthia Harkness had resumed life just where she left off that day a year ago in the camp the other side of the Blue Mountains. Only careful nursing was necessary now.

She was overjoyed with baby Joe, took him for Buddy at first. Gradually she learned the story. No one told her anything until she asked; most of the days she spent in natural sleep. Nettie Harper agreed to remain for a few weeks until Mrs. Hark-

ness was able to sit up. Julia Margaret could manage the work alone, now that the harvest was over.

Judge Barfield drove up one day in their shiny wagon, with Mrs. Barfield, erect and clothed with her dignity, on the seat beside him. They had come to inquire about Mrs. Harkness. Everyone called the family by their name now. Wild Flower Ann was as if she had never been, and the name Salita Prentiss dropped like honey from the tongues of men and women.

The girl was a heroine, a personage in the community, but she didn't know it. She knew nothing but her own overpowering fatigue. Now that the long strain was over, she drooped like a wild flower held overlong in the hot hand of a careless child.

Mrs. Barfield, when she had alighted, moved over to the girl and kissed her just as if they had always been the best of friends, and Judge Barfield shook her hand and patted her on the shoulder. "Mother has come to take you home with us for a week's rest, Salita," he said.

"John has two weeks more to work before he comes home and there is plenty of room for you," Mrs. Barfield urged. "You need nursing yourself, child," she said positively. "We must bring back the color to your cheeks."

Joe Harkness urged Salita to go with them. "I never knew a girl to stand up under so much," he told the judge admiringly. "I owe my family to her

and Luke. She's my girl, just as Mattie Lou is. I mean to make up to her for what she's done for us."

Tears, always ready to fall nowadays, sprang to Salita's eyes at the warm praise. She had never realized that she had done anything in any way remarkable, just carried on a day at a time in the situation in which fate had placed her.

She looked at Mrs. Barfield gratefully; the mention of rest filled her with longing. She wanted more than anything else in the world to go to bed and stay there until the ache left her tired body and her young strength came back to her.

"I'm so glad to go, Mrs. Barfield." She accepted the invitation gratefully and went to gather up a few clothes and to say good-by to Cynthia Harkness, who was gaining hour by hour under her husband's care. She thought happily that they no longer needed her. She was free to follow her own inclinations.

Mrs. Barfield undressed Salita as if she were a child, and after giving her a warm bath clothed her in a dainty linen nightgown edged with knit lace, and put her in a large spool bed in a darkened room —a soft bed with cool linen sheets and plump downy pillows. She kissed her and smoothed her glory of red hair tenderly as she arranged the braids for her comfort and left her to sleep.

Not a sound marred the silence of those three days of blessed rest. She slept except when a gracious lady brought tempting food served from dainty

china; slept until life surged through her again. Three days of absolute rest and loving care restored Salita Prentiss. The last morning she stretched lazily when she awoke and lay looking idly about the room for a moment before she sprang out of bed.

Her hostess came at once when she heard her stirring. "I want my clothes," Salita told her happily. "I must be going home today. I can scarcely wait to see how much Mrs. Harkness has gained while I have been away."

"Wait a few days," Mrs. Barfield urged. "I want to send you home completely rested."

"I'm rested now," Salita told her brightly. "I never take long rests. Mr. Harkness will need my help; there's so much to do. I haven't seen baby Joe for so long and he's home now. I must go right away before breakfast."

She refused Judge Barfield's offer to drive her over, and ran lightly home across the stubble field where the cows were grazing. Perhaps Uncle Riley Chatham had arrived in her absence. She had not heard a word of news for three days.

Cynthia Harkness had gained marvelously during Salita's absence. Her mind was clear. She looked at her little world out of calm eyes that followed her husband when he moved about the room.

No, Uncle Riley Chatham had not come yet, but they were looking for him any day now. The household was fairly on tiptoe with expectation. No one

would have recognized the happy children for the sober little things whose lives for the last year had been lived under the sorrow of their mother's plight and their father's absence.

Salita alone was saddened. She had no one. Now that she came to think of it, she could rejoice that there was no stain on her honor, but she felt utterly alone in the world. The Harkness family were united and no longer really needed her.

"You have developed your claim right good, Salita; it'll be worth quite a tidy sum of money this fall. Like as not Uncle Riley Chatham will advance me money to buy it from you if you want to sell. You have eleven head of good horses, too, and Luke thinks that you are entitled to half the money when the potato crop is sold."

Joe Harkness was known in the States as a just man. Here was proof. Salita smiled happily. "I had planned to go back to Kentucky as soon as Uncle Riley Chatham came to take care of the children," she told him.

"Go back to Kentucky," Joe Harkness said. "Why should you want to go back to Kentucky? You're our girl, just like one of our own children to mother and me. I'd never consent to your leaving home. A girl needs her own folks, and you have no one back there."

"I've sort of changed my plans lately, though," Salita amended. "I think I'll be happy here now." A quizzical little smile played tenderly about her

lips. Mrs. Barfield had told her that they had driven over to the farm where John was working and he had forgiven her. He would be home as soon as harvest was over. Of course he had not heard of Joe Harkness's return. The girl knew that nothing would keep him away, once he knew that she was free to marry him.

In her heart she was daily expecting him, though she only admitted it to herself in the stillness of the night. She could come to him now with not the least hesitation. Oregon was home, after all, where those to whom she had bound herself with the tender ties of love and service lived and where she had made fast friends. Her heart sang as she went about her work.

How the sun shone on the yellow stubble and how long and cool and grateful the shadows were as the sun went down in the evening. Strange that she had been so blind to the loveliness about her. She was a radiant, happy girl again, sobered by the loss of her father and mother, but serene and content that she had come through severe trials in triumph. She sang about her task—as a merry girl of nineteen would with a lover who would soon be home from the harvesting.

Her hair glowed like burnished copper from the vigorous daily brushing she gave it. Her brown calico dress was dainty with its soft white collar and cuffs. A radiant girl greeted John Barfield when he came in the soft dusk.

Joe Harkness took in the situation easily enough; perhaps some of the neighbors had told him of John Barfield's infatuation for Salita. Uncle Sel was always enlarging on the affair when he could find someone who would listen to him. At any rate, the father showed a rare understanding as he hustled the children off to bed and went in to make his wife comfortable for the night.

At last they two stood alone in a starlit summer night, with the crickets chirping and the soft night noises of sleepy birds coming to them from the trees near the cabin.

"You were expecting me, Salita?" John Barfield asked breathlessly.

"Yes, I knew you'd come over the minute you reached home. Your mother told me you were coming soon." She was suddenly overcome with embarrassment and could not go on.

John Barfield laughed happily. The stars were revolving dizzily about the pair as he took her in his arms and kissed her upturned face.

THE END

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First Sir Percy, The. Baroness Orczy.
Fish Preferred. P. G. Wodehouse.
Flame of Happiness, The. Florence Ward.
Flames of Desire. L. Noel.
Flaming Jewel, The. Robert W. Chambers.
Flamingo. Mary Borden.
Fleur de Lys. J. G. Sarasin.
Flood Tide. Sara Ware Basset.
Flowing Gold. Rex Beach.
Flutes of Shanghai, The. Louise Jordan Miln.
Flying Clues. Charles J. Dutton.
Flying Squad, The. Edgar Wallace.
Fool in the Forest, A. Anthony Pryde.
Foolish Virgin, The. Kathleen Norris.
Footsteps in the Night. G. Fraser-Simpson.
Footsteps That Stopped. A. Fielding.

Forbidden Door, The. Herman Landon.
Forbidden Trail, The. Honore Willsie Morrow.
Forbidden Lips. Terry Shannon.
Foreman of the Forty-Bar. Frank G. Robertson.
Forever Free. Honore Willsie Morrow.
Forfeit, The. Ridgwell Cullum.
Fortunate Wayfarer, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Fortunate Mary, The. Eleanor H. Porter.
Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds. Howard Vincent O'Brien.
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, The. Vicente Blasco Ibanez.
Four Just Men, The. Edgar Wallace.
Four Million, The. O. Henry.
Foursquare. Grace S. Richmond.
Four Stragglers, The. Frank L. Packard.
Fourteenth Key, The. Carolyn Wells.
Fourth Finger, The. Anthony Wynne.
Four Winds, The. Sinclair Gluck.
Fox Woman, The. Nalbro Bartley.
Free Grass. Ernest Haycox.
French Wife, The. Dorothy Graham.
From Now On. Frank L. Packard.
From Six to Six. W. Bert Foster.
Frontier of the Deep, The. Will Beale.
Frozen Inlet Post. James B. Hendryx.
Frozen Justice. Ejnar Mikkelsen.
Full of the Moon. Caroline Lockhart.
Fur Brigade. Hal G. Evarts.
Further Adventures of Jimmie Dale, The. Frank L. Packard.
Furthest Fury, The. Carolyn Wells.
Fury. Edmund Goulding.

Gabriel Samara, Peacemaker. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Galusha the Magnificent. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Garde A'Vous (On Guard). J. D. Newson.
Garden of Flames. E. S. Stevens.
Gaspards of Pine Croft. Ralph Connor.
Gate Through the Mountain, The. Hugh Pendexter.
Gay Ones, The. Charles Hanson Towne.
Gay Year, The. Dorothy Speare.
Gentle Grafter, The. O. Henry.
Gentleman Grizzly. Reginald C. Barker.
Gertrude Haviland's Divorce. Inez Haynes Irwin.
Get Your Man. Ethel and James Dorrance.
Ghost of Hemlock Canyon. Harold Bindloss.
Giants in the Earth. O. E. Rolvaag.

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